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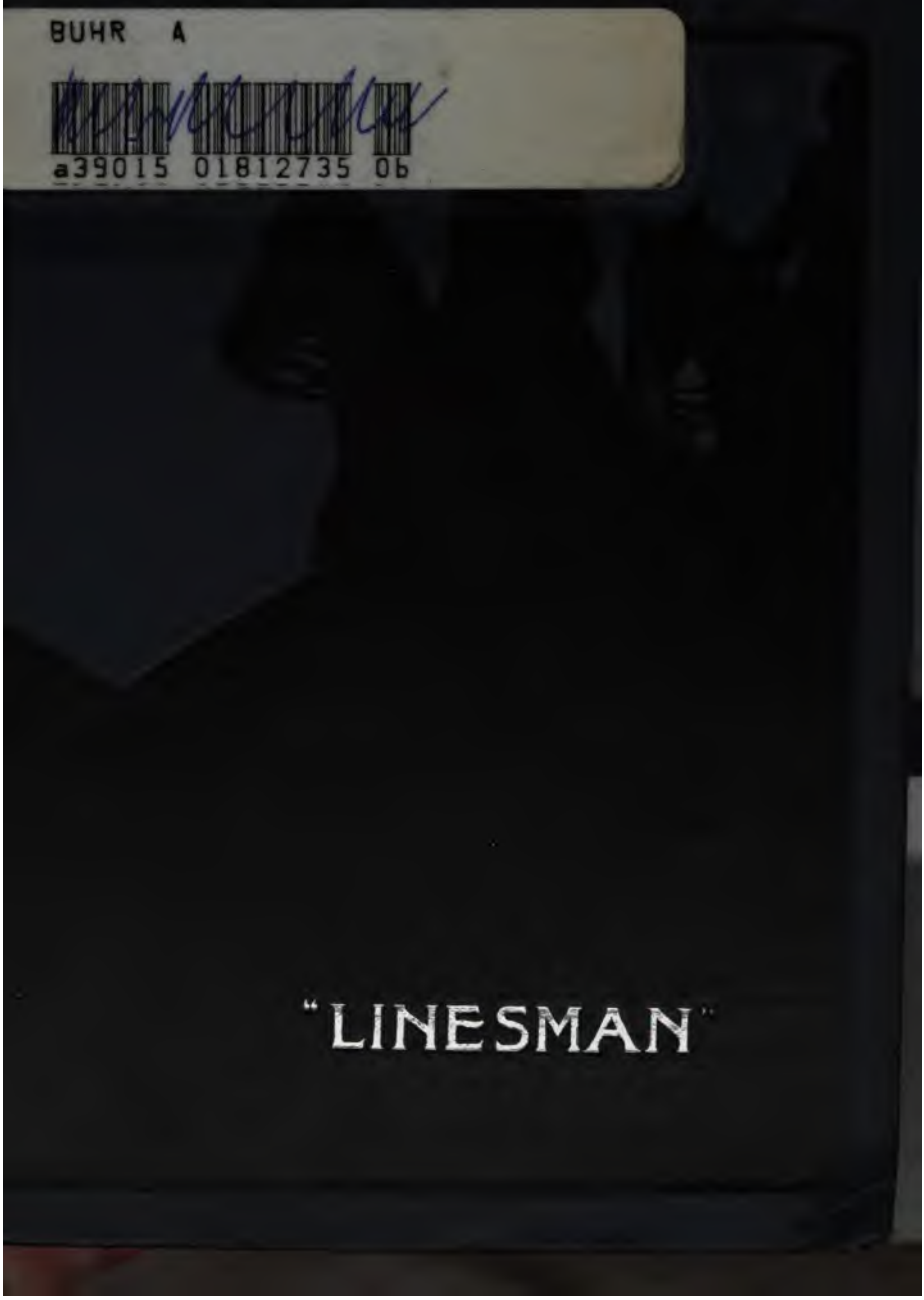

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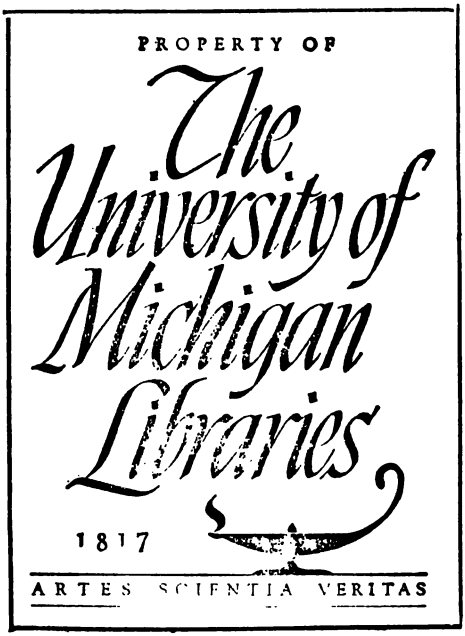
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WORDS BY AN EYEWITNESS

THE STRUGGLE IN NATAL

BY

"LINESMAN"
Maurice Harold GRANT

"Words by an eyewitness! You have there the words which a son of Adam, looking on the phenomenon itself, saw fittest for depicturing it."—CARLYLE.

SIXTH IMPRESSION

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PREFACE.

NOTE.

On the eve of publication of this Volume another graphic sketch entitled "Day" has reached the Editor of 'Maga' from "Linesman." Readers will find the paper in 'Blackwood's Magazine' for December 1901.

fury which inspired them in the writing. Once faded, a palimpsest of such a document is an impossibility.

This little volume is thus more a sketch-book of emotions than of facts, though I have

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PREFACE.

THESE papers, reprinted from 'Blackwood's Magazine,' and written hastily from the seat of war in the intervals of the events they describe, are not to be taken as aiming at anything more than they do—viz., to sketch occurrences as accurately as possible before time could wear away the impressions they left on a participant. They are, therefore, not History, nor to be considered as such, but merely an attempt to fill up something of what History, perhaps necessarily, omits, the *human* side of the great document of war, that side which rapidly becomes illegible when the men who wrote it have forgotten the peril, toil, and fury which inspired them in the writing. Once faded, a palimpsest of such a document is an impossibility.

This little volume is thus more a sketch-book of emotions than of facts, though I have

endeavoured as far as possible to verify all statements of fact herein made, lest injustice should be done to any one. But it is a comfort to think that where facts and deeds have in almost every case produced nothing in their narrator but humble admiration of the doers of them, little injustice is to be feared from inaccuracies inevitable to stories written of the heat of war amid the rumour of camp. For any that may be found I crave pardon, asking the discoverer—if a stay-at-home—to remember that lookers-on proverbially see more of a game than a player; and if a comrade during the campaign, to recollect the vast extent of the operations, and his own daze and preoccupation whilst they were in progress.

If these articles do no more than faintly picture to the vicariously warlike some idea of the realities of war, they will not have been written in vain. Wars are not always—as this one has been—a necessity; and when they are not, he who enters upon them with a "light heart" may find his possession a curiously heavy one when the prick of inexorable Time has let out the passion which inflated it.

"LINESMAN."

TRANSVAAL, *September* 1901.

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THE STRUGGLE IN NATAL.

I.

OUR SOLDIERS.

No one has said a word against *them*, at any rate, so that no defence such as has been offered for their superiors[1] is necessary. *En passant*, herewith many thanks from a client to that anonymous pleader, in the name of all officers, who, conscious of not being abnormally "stupid," or out of the way "ignorant" or incorrigibly "idle," or even more "reckless" than the majority of their civilian friends (a cunning, underhand thrust that "reckless," a sneer or a compliment at will), feel a debt of gratitude to one who has taken pains to disprove charges unanswerable by the in-

[1] "Our Officers," 'Blackwood's Magazine,' July 1900.

dicted without incurring a further charge of trumpet-blowing. The writer can answer for it that British officers have felt these charges keenly, even though the confession may give pleasure to the anonymous arm-chaired critics who have made them. By many a bivouac-fire and on many a lonely picket they have been discussed and ruminated upon. Perhaps even in perilous advances they have occurred to their victims, until every shell shrieked "ignorant" and every bullet spat "stupid" at the man who knew enough, at any rate, to be hurrying his idle feet into the very gates of death much faster than any ignored drill-book ever laid down. Well, well, we will not re-open the wound, but will content ourselves with deploring that it was ever inflicted by friends behind upon friends already sufficiently busy with enemies in front. It was ill-timed, at least, and will the critics be satisfied, for the present, with the brief plea which the writer ventures to make on behalf of all British officers at the front? "We have done our best: no man can do more; many might not have done so much, and we are sorry it has not been good enough."

So much for the officer. It is of the man, Private Thomas Atkins, he who forms a nine-

hundredth part of the old Blankshire Regiment, that this paper proposes to treat,—as he looks, thinks, and, above all, acts, in the presence of the enemy. He at least is appreciated at his value. The daily paper, the weekly illustrated, the monthly magazine, the quarterly condensation of "cultchaw," know him well, and, knowing him, love him and say so. In Parliament Demosthenes waxes fulsome over him; even Thersites is silent in his presence, or at least contents himself with a verbal lash at the amount of money he costs. The atmosphere around the arm-chair—natural habitat of the carper—is genial and mild. The masses, too, close those of their myriad mouths which are wont to grumble and growl at things imperial and expensive. Private Atkins is both, but he is from the masses himself, God bless him! and the myriad mouths roar their approbation when he conquers, or breathe a mighty sigh of sympathy when he has failed and perished; for, lucky nation that we are, he has a habit of seldom doing one without the other. In fact, there is no more universally beloved individual in the world than this same scarlet Atkins—a state of things which may at any moment flame up into ecstasy, what time he has exchanged the scarlet for his working suit of

khaki, and is away on business. Then appear songs, double-adjectived and pathetico-comic, in his honour, to be trilled by fashionable actresses to fashionable audiences amid a shower of currency. Then do the thoughtless begin to make use of his phraseology in speech and print, veiling his grace-word under the euphemism "blessed," and deeming themselves mighty smart as they do so. Then do subscriptions pour in, and portentous funds accumulate for his relief, for his wife's relief, for the relief of the poor girl who ought to be his wife (not by any means so numerous a band as singers and audiences imagine), for the relief of the givers themselves in their admiration and love. It is Mr Atkins's apotheosis, and we say again that he deserves it, the more for being the man he is than the god they would make him.

But, in spite of all this, there is a vast amount of curiosity, and, inferentially, of ignorance, about this same Atkins when engaged at his trade—that is to say, on active service in such distant lands that even the roar of applause, the songs and the shoutings, reach him but faintly. By the time he comes home he will be greeted with but an echo of it, perhaps, for the interests of a civilised and busy people are many, and somebody else is

always ready to skip on to the stage when the war ballet is done with. One of the commonest questions put by civilians to officers lately returned from the wars is, "How did the men behave" on such and such an occasion? And it is as commonly misunderstood, I think, by those who have to answer it. What the questioner wants to know is not the general tactical demeanour of the men, what the author of the drill-book—cold student of massed emotions—calls "*morale*," but something very much more personal and full of human interest. What said the men when the shells began to yell through the air; what manner of countenance did they bear when their pals fled from the ranks into eternity, perhaps in the middle of a sentence? Did you hear or see anything that a man may not see at an Aldershot field-day, when the word came to assault, and it became necessary to fix bayonets? Was the signal to retreat, accursed of soldiers, reflected in any manner upon their faces? A thousand things, which every one wants to know, but which can only be answered in moods of greatest confidence in deserted smoking-rooms, and suchlike retired places, and not always then. The writer himself wanted to know them badly but a short year ago. Are soldiers ashamed of the psy-

chology of their splendid profession? I can vouch that they are not ignorant of it, for it is the touchstone by which they test the metal of their subordinates in tight places. An officer who cannot feel the intangible waves of emotion that sweep over his men during the phases of a battle is no officer at all, or should not be: for is it not his business to make use of the tide, to carry his crew onward upon its rush, to bid them hang on fast and keep a good heart when it slackens or sucks back again; to look the other way and pretend he does not see when its ebb is low, and men look stonily at invisible things in the air, or wildly at things too visible on the earth beneath? A regimental officer should be able, and in spite of his "stupidity" usually is able, to play upon the complex instrument of his men's emotions like Nachez upon his fiddle-strings. The big generals are mere organ-players compared to him—they pull the stops, and things happen, that is all; but the colonel and his centurions are the artists, and many a successful man, caught up to Olympus in the shape of the staff, has had his cup of joy embittered by the thought that the most interesting part of his profession lay behind him.

A soldier's first action! What volumes have

been written upon it, speculative mostly, lurid invariably, realistic and truthful seldom, for the descriptions they deal in are usually of emotions a man *might* feel, nay, ought to feel on an occasion when the whole natural fabric of human life, thought, and instinct is turned inside-out and rent to shreds. I speak of modern engagements only. Old time fighting with its knee to knee and blade to blade was natural enough. It was a venerable amusement even in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, and his brother bandits. But for a man to stand up alive and warm, aware that huge invisible projectiles are hurtling towards him from invisible guns, with death unspeakable as their errand, that millions of deaths fill the air, in the shape of rifle bullets, that behind this screen of screaming steel lie thousands of men who hate him, who seek his blood, who would cheer with joy to see him—hitherto cherished and beloved — dashed into a dozen bloody fragments before their eyes, — this is an experience so utterly unnatural and new, that, strange to say, it defeats its own ends, and usually leaves unmoved those who undergo it for the first time. The writer's first taste of fire was an unexpected shelling of the camp when dinners were being prepared, and all men

were in the peaceful frame of mind inseparable from the fragrant smell of cooking meat. A high whistle, like an escape of gas in the air, a heavy thud upon the ground between two rows of tents, an appalling crash and a leap into the air of clods of earth, and a whirring and groaning of fragments of jagged iron,—these were the signs amidst which the faint boom of the gun responsible for them was almost unnoticed. Another and another, while men still gaped at the first: the camp was under fire sure enough. How very like the pictures was the bursting of the 40-lb. shells! All hands were ordered to seek shelter under the lee of a bit of rising ground in front; how were all hands taking it, considering that they were men who had only landed from the transport three days before? Apparently they were not "taking it" at all, in the sense of being affected by it. I have seen soldiers make more fuss over the upsetting of a perambulator than they did over the shouting of those grim messengers from the far-off kopje. Some slept, others lay grumbling at the spoilt dinner, a few took a mild interest in the destination of the shells, and laughed a little when they fell and burst in a totally different spot to what they had ex-

pected, or laughed a good deal when they fell and did not burst at all, as often happened. It was not an action, it is true, but it was "being shelled," and shelled at one's very front door; so surely one had a right to look for a blanched face or two, or even a nervous manner in some of the younger soldiers. These shells did not even kill the usual dog, and when they ceased (and the Boer gunners were no doubt counting the heaps of slain through their field-glasses) the hungry shelterers trooped back to their "dixies," [1] and wasted not a thought upon them, until the "Maconochie" [2] had vanished, and there was nothing else to think of.

Then came Colenso. What finer frolicking ground for all the human emotions could be invented for all save one—the thrill of triumph? Hope, anger, fear, mortal terror, grief, bitter disappointment, humiliation, despair, — were there not grounds for them all and room for each? When had a great British army, complete in equipment, primed with health and confidence, led by a famous general — when had such an invincible machine ever failed before? Yet when did beaten men ever walk more calmly back from disaster than did those

[1] Soldiers' rendering of Hindustani *dekshi*, a kettle.
[2] Tinned ration.

shattered brigades from that death-dealing river-bank, with the sun eating out their very senses above, and their legs failing from fatigue beneath them? A joke during such an inferno? I heard many, and many a grumble too, best sign of all, and many a regretful reference to the beer they knew they couldn't get and the beef they very strongly felt they ought to get. Brave men with hearts aright, not untouched by the horrors jostling you on every side; not unmoved when poor Bill, next man to you, "oh'd" forth his soul suddenly and awfully with a bullet in his brain; not unmindful of the tragedy you were acting, or of "what they would say at home," but brushing it all aside in the hope that a defeat cheerfully taken might be no defeat at all. You were right, many an illusion born of barrack-room life was chased and beaten that day; you learnt to know each other, and your officers learnt to know you so well during those hours of agony, that instead of "My men," many a one was fain to whisper "My children."

But these are only generalities, albeit true ones enough. The battle of Colenso was no occasion for speculations upon the emotions of other people. Even one's own could not be quizzed from any analytical pedestal except by

an investigator possessed of powers of detachment more than mortal. Yet certain incidents occur to the memory which may help to fill in the portrait we are trying to draw of Mr Atkins's mental attitude in battle. Early in the advance, long before the stupendous folly of it had dawned upon any one, great shells were falling among the long lines of troops, for the most part between them, throwing up brown geysers of soft earth all over the huge meadow over which the army was spread. One of these monsters landed with a shriek and a thump between the writer and the company he was leading, and burst with a magnificent whirring roar. What did that company do? Did they suck back and pause—the very mildest expression of fear in a frightened man? Did a single foot remain poised in the middle of a step until that explosion had spent itself? Not one. The company certainly lost its perfect alignment for a moment, because the men in the immediate vicinity of the cataclysm were edging rapidly *towards* it to search for fragments of the shattered projectile, and to stare at the hole it had blasted in the ground!

Farther on, when we had entered that spitting, humming zone of rifle-fire, the like of which no living soldier had ever before wit-

nessed, a bullet skimmed along the top of a man's head, just grazing the skin, and flicking off the hair in its course. Surely the time for a prayer, or even a shriek, if ever there were one. "I've just had a free 'air-cut, mates!" was the only observation heard by the officer who witnessed this ghastly jest of the Pale One. Then came that series of spasmodic rushes from ant-hill to ant-hill, which formed the last portion of that never-to-be-forgotten advance. Rifle-fire has often been compared to hail, but it is pretty safe to say that it never gave a more faithful representation than it did upon the smooth veldt between those merciful ant-hills. It is credible that rough jokes, loud inquiries after the welfare of friends next door, or rather next heap, could be heard sounding from ant-hill to ant-hill from jolly red faces pressed against them behind? It may not be credible but it is history. Then the pom-pom, heard for the first time,—it was a little hard on that keen-eyed watch-dog of a gun that its awesome barking should be imitated to the very life by its intended victims themselves. But, alas! British soldiers have no sense of dignity; they are never dignified themselves of malice aforethought, and if that busy piece had listened, it

might have heard "pom-pom-pom-pom" from many throats *not* of cast steel. These are but skimmings, mere drops from that ocean of incidents, but, as Mr Pecksniff said, "they testify."

After that the retirement. The red faces lose their jollity in a flash, as they turn at the word of command from those vicious kopjes behind to the distant camp. All the weariness of those ten hours, the hunger and thirst, the thoughts of dead comrades, perhaps most of all the sorrow for dead hopes, set their seal upon the British countenances as if by magic. That tramp back, even after it had dragged itself out of reach of the long arms of the long French guns, was a dismal enough experience. Unreally slow, too, though there was no thought of impressing the enemy by a retirement of studied leisure. But they *must* have been impressed, nevertheless, even more than by the callous advance earlier in the day; and subsequent conversations with Boers go to show that many a patriot mouth and pair of eyes opened very wide indeed at the spectacle of human beings literally unstoppable by flying lead. It was Sir John Moore who said that British soldiers were "no good in a retirement." Well, the campaign in South Africa has slain yet another hoary delusion. Not that they are

to be accounted pleasant, companionable people in such a situation. Wordsworth — child of peace that he was, it is almost sacrilege to quote him in this connection — has two lines which describe the retreating soldiery to a nicety, like

"a party in a parlour,
. . . .
All silent and all damned!"

And sulky, it may be added, looking severely to the front, which *ought* to be the rear, in prickly unapproachable mood, tactically defeated, but morally bursting with a savagery that would have speedily forced a bloody triumph if the general would have but let them sacrifice themselves.

There were many retirements for the army of Natal after that, as all the world knows— some melancholy, some as unemotional and as passive as lead, one terrible and full of gloom, one of romantic suspense and risk. The writer hopes to describe them in detail some day, for, thank God that a soldier can say so, they form a chapter in our military history to be read with as much pride for the "lads in red" as ever glowed in an Englishman's heart at any tale of victory. There is a triumph of defeat as well as of glory; few soldiers in the world

but our own have ever gained it. No soldiers but our own have ever turned their backs on an exulting foe, with their discipline intact—nay, more rigid and dignified than before; with their spirit as high, their courage as steadfast, their faith in a gallant commander grappling with a wellnigh impossible task as unshaken as that of any army which ever rushed to victory at its first onset.

It is a commonplace amongst soldiers that the severest test to which men can be subjected is a long and severe dose of artillery-fire, without a chance of reprisal, or being permitted to advance. The God of war saw fit to impose this test upon General Hildyard's 2nd brigade on the penultimate day of our precarious occupation of Vaal-Krantz. For fifteen hours shells fell upon that miserable kopje from a 40-pounder perched upon Spion Kop, from six 7-pounders on Brakfontein, from two pom-poms in varying positions, from a 3-inch Creusot in its usual state of hurry, from an irascible old gentleman of a 94-pounder on Doorn Kloof. Wheugh-bang! Piff, piff, piff! Orrgh-crash! Never did bird-fanciers recognise more certainly the different notes of the warblers of the grove than did those 3000 lodgers on the kopje the respective voices of

those vile, unceasing shells. Some died, some were carried away on dripping stretchers before they could learn the full gamut. And the survivors? The few within the writer's ken — quarrelled! During a lucid interval in the shelling, the regimental cooks (never-failing worthies, shall no pen do ye the honour ye merit some day?) had contrived to make and distribute tea to the men lying prone in their shelters. The distribution was *not*, perhaps, impartial. The menace of 94-lb. shrapnel would make a liquor-measure uncertain with the eyes of a hundred Government inspectors glued upon it! So there arose a bickering. Tom, down below, must obviously have taken more than his share, else how came it that Mick above (the kopje was shaped like a mansard roof) had to content himself with less? "Peace!" yelled the monstrous shrapnel at the height of the argument; "Shut up!" snapped the pom-pom shells; "Silence!" boomed the far-off 40-pounder. Not a bit of it. No foreign-made projectile ever fired shall stop a Briton well under weigh with a grievance! That argument flourished amazingly under the shower, and only died away when the glaring sun overhead began to induce an unforgiving

slumber in defrauded Micks and impugned, indignant Toms. A straw again, but a significant one.

The writer was once surprised at raising quite a little controversial storm by a suggestion he ventured to make in the course of an article in which he was attempting to contrast the soldier of fact with the soldier of fiction. In enumerating the causes which in his opinion induced men to enlist, and ascribing to each its estimated commonness or rarity, the "desire for glory" was labelled "rare," to the vast indignation of a great many civilian readers, and the somewhat apologetic acquiescence of certain military ones. The campaign in the Transvaal has given little reason to change the docket,—it rather confirms it. The British soldier does not *desire* glory. That he wins it, drinks it to the full, whole beakers of it, is beside the point, but nothing is further from his thoughts at the very moment that he is quaffing his deepest draughts of it. It is his very unconsciousness of his heroism which makes him the hero he is. Under fire, in the rush of a charge, shattering an onslaught of the enemy's, commonplacedness—even what on other occasions might be dubbed vulgarity—is heroic, because at such times to the man who is

not a hero these things are the most impossible in the world. I tremble for the British army when it shall go into action thinking of despatches, of war correspondents, of glorious graves, and the throbbing of great organs at memorial services. It thinks of none of these things at present. It thinks rather of unattainable beer or tea, of the next camping-ground, of its balance credit in the savings bank, of the probable duration of its dubious pair of contract boots. It thinks these ridiculous trivialities, and does great deeds to their accompaniment. It does not think of, and therefore cannot desire, glory, and for that very reason it wins it. For the desire of glory is an unhealthy mental condition, conducive to tenseness of nerve, to reaction when the Holy Grail is apparently fading away before the eyes, to despair when it has vanished. Any one of this psychological trio would be fatal in a private soldier, so that Providence, having seen fit to decree that the British private was to be the most perfect exponent of his branch of business in existence, wisely withheld them all from him, and gave him the prize itself, instead of the yearning for it.

A little knowledge is, proverbially, a dangerous thing. Hence there is no man more sur-

prised at the bravery and endurance of his men than an officer who has walked with them only in the paths of peace. He is far more unprepared for it than the British public, which may be said to be entirely ignorant of every part of soldiers' characters not portrayable in sixpenny magazines—by far the greater part, needless to say. He is, of course, more unprepared for it than the man of many battles, who has seen and handled the pawns in the great game before. It must be admitted that there is little in the average Tommy's deportment in barracks at home to indicate the amazing qualities latent within him, only to be drawn out by the stress of combat. He does not appear to possess any extraordinary amount of endurance, for instance; one may witness more men falling out on a summer's day stroll to the Fox Hills and back than have been seen on any of the many and arduous forced marches in South Africa, performed often by sleepless and unfed men, sometimes with the depression of defeat heavy upon them. Nor is his sense of discipline overwhelming in the piping times of peace. Indeed, one may meet venerable officers in a serious state of alarm at the free-and-easiness of the latter-day soldier, and younger ones indignant and disheartened at the apparent

absence of the "military sense" in their over-educated charges. There is no cause for alarm or indignation. Education has successfully refuted the gravest charge ever brought against it. It has not lessened true discipline—nay, it must have increased it, for the army in South Africa has differed from no army that ever took the field before, save in being more educated and more perfectly disciplined.

But there is nothing mortal that can be unreservedly praised, and it would be a *most* untruthful portrait of Mr Atkins that showed him proudly standing, with a simper of unblemished monotonous perfection upon his heroic countenance. One would expect to see the legend, "Penny plain, twopence coloured," on such a picture, which would be dear at the price, because it would not be a portrait at all. He has his military imperfections. Moreover, he has suffered from them in a contest with a foe who happened to excel in the very points in which he was weakest; and without perceptible improvement on his part, from which it is fair to deduce that they are incurable. In the first place, he is slow to perceive a danger or a possible advantage, slow to meet the first or seize the latter. Danger he rarely sees until it is upon him, and he is forced to call into play

the power in which he is pre-eminent over any fighting men in the world—that of extricating himself from it with success and honour. It would surprise the reader, unlearned in military history, if some statistician were to show him how many of the deeds of glory which illumine its pages have been done as atonement for mistakes, some on the part of careless officers, more of careless men. It would astonish the same unlearned reader if the same statistician were to draw up the casualty lists which might have been reduced by two-thirds, had certain attacks, or other manœuvres, been made a few hours or moments sooner, — manœuvres whose tactical soundness was nullified by the slowness and unpreparedness of the men. The men are casual, too, a quality that does not appear at all heroic, but exceedingly annoying and worrying to anxious regimental officers, who perhaps would as soon lose a relation as one of their charges. They take no care of themselves, and look with an exasperating air of indulgence and pity upon any man who takes care of them. If snug cover is, by some happy chance, to be had during heavy fire, it occurs to them as being a suitable coign of vantage from which to survey the enemy or to take in the details of the engagement; sometimes nothing short of threats will keep

those helmeted heads below the life-saving parapet of the trenches or sangars. In connection with the "tea-fight" upon Vaal-Krantz, I would be afraid to say how many of the debaters attempted to assume that ascendancy which an upright position was bound to afford over a prone opposition; and Mr Gully had never more need of his stern word of command to induce a contentious member to resume his seat, than had the writer with his argumentative little House upon that shell-stricken ridge.

Another great fault discernible in our soldiers is their too great dependence upon their officers. For this, it may be urged, their training is responsible; but though partially true, I think that the genius for being led is so ingrained in our men that independent, unsuperintended action can never be expected of them. No men will do better what they are directed to do, but no men are less likely to do the right thing in the absence of their accustomed director. This is curious, because a British soldier is infinitely more intelligent than thousands of his enemies, for whom officers would be almost useless, so well does each individual adapt himself, of his own initiative, to the varying requirements of an action. This difference will never be better exemplified than it has been during the campaign

against the Boers. There can be no comparison between the intellectual capacity of the dopper farmer and that of the average British private, so great is the advantage held by the latter; and bodily strength and activity being about equal, "the betting" would appear to be odds on the Briton, numbers and other things being equal. But I think that most soldiers will agree that if a dozen Boers and a dozen English private soldiers were to be pitted against each other, say from opposite ends of a three-mile stretch of average South African country, the Britons would probably be surrounded, without, perhaps, having caught even so much as a glimpse of their opponents, unless the glimpse were given them on purpose. To begin with, they would probably insist on sticking together, and, in the absence of an officer to remind them of it, would as likely as not even forget, or be unwilling, to extend in open order, until they were actually fired upon; whereas the Boers, on mischief bent, would at once proceed to occupy as much front as British conventions have hitherto accorded to an army corps. Here we have another fault, the inveterate love of company, when it is not only not desirable, but possibly fatal. (Remember that by "fault" is meant unmilitary fault only, a disability in the presence of the enemy, which

may or may not be superable.) Then it is exceedingly probable that our dozen Tommies, representatives of probably the worst topographists in the world, would lose their direction in the first hollow or donga they came upon, losing at the same time, of course, their knowledge of the way back in case of need. They would certainly neglect to watch their flanks, or provide against surprise by detaching one or two of their number to scout ahead of them. They would certainly never think of scanning the country from the first eminence, in order to form a guess as to the most likely spot an enemy might be in wait for them. They would equally certainly (we are presuming that the actual presence of their opponents is unknown to them except as a possibility) lose all interest or suspicion after a quarter of an hour's unmolested advance, and would then possibly elect to snatch a few moments' rest and relaxation, as likely as not in a shady dingle-bottom, to the edges of which a hundred elephants could stalk unseen and look down upon them. In fact, they would do everything they ought not to do, and that a Boer would not do, and leave undone pretty nearly everything they ought to do for their own defence and the confusion of the enemy. Want of training, or ill-

directed training, is, I say again, not entirely responsible for this. No amount of training will give a man who is so essentially a man as Atkins that animal sense which all Boers and savages naturally possess, and which many of his officers have either acquired by practice or bitter experience, or supplement by precautions which may be called its artificial equivalents. He is neither cautious nor cunning, nor apt to profit by practice or bitter experience. He prefers to trust to his phenomenal luck and phenomenal courage, but, better than all, to his officer. Undoubtedly a handicap in the great stakes, for officers cannot always be present; they are as recognised a billet for bullets, too, as their non-commissioned comrades, and it would be a great thing for the army if their men could become aware of their absence without the uneasy consciousness that their chief safeguard — their eyes, ears, and brains—had gone with them.

But having said this, I have said all. The list of Tommy's deficiencies is as nothing compared to that of his military virtues. He is brave, enduring, disciplined, cheerful under misfortune, temperate in success; modest withal, and prone to forget, with surprising quickness, deeds which live for ever in the minds of his

compatriots at home. He is everything, in fact, that a soldier should be, save in one particular; and it is difficult as an Englishman not to secretly accord him yet another good mark, when we learn that the missing virtue is cunning!

II.

AFTER COLENSO.

After Colenso a long pause, sombre and bewildering to the nation beyond anything in the annals of English history, with three defeated British armies pulling themselves together and compiling terrible casualty lists out of range of the positions from which they had been rolled back. What a maelstrom of emotions surges round a British defeat! But amongst them can there be one more awful than that which overwhelms the beaten general? It may be fancy, but does not the system and composition of our army bring its good or ill fortune very much more to the terms of the personal equation than is the case in any other? For our generals are gentlemen, not pedants or politicians, as the cross-sworded fraternity of the Continent seem to be. Their officers, down to the very youngest, have danced with their

daughters in their own drawing-rooms, chatted over the teacups with their wives, or bowled out the old soldier himself at cricket, or, to his delight, been beaten by him in a gallop to hounds. So that his misery is to them a piteous thing, and theirs to him almost unendurable. "Poor old chap!" say they, "Poor boys!" says he, no railing in either headquarter or regimental mess, only an extraordinary sympathy and hope, assets as good as fresh troops to the general, and as a Moltke to his officers.

It is the same with the men: this one has reaped Sir Thomas's corn, or planted his geraniums, or groomed his hunters—anything you will but looked upon him as his general, the man to whom he should be a pawn, without a soul, without a name, with but feet, arms, and an eye to shoot with. Are we not fortunate in our anachronistic old army? One could not help thinking so when there lay in front of Magersfontein, Stormberg, and Colenso, three fine English armies, led by three fine old English gentlemen and generals with the bubble of their generalship burst in the tremendous hand-clap of war. No other sentiment in the world but this sympathy and intimacy could have kept despondency from the army. As it was, there was none; a stranger walking

through the camp of Buller's army at Chieveley a day after the battle would have thought that the battle was yet to come. The shadow which I am told lay over England was all sunshine here, an incredible jollity permeated the camp. Never mind Stormberg, or the poor Highlanders' flesher's shop, or our own big licking, the biggest of a century — those are public matters; the immediate question is, Who is going to win the divisional hurdle-race on Christmas Day? and there is a row over the tug-of-war yet to be decided. There are also letters to write, unspeakably bad ones, relating not one jot or tittle of what their recipients are hungering to hear; and letters to read, pathetic pages breathing gratitude to Almighty God so immense that it is almost unintelligible to the readers. The fiery furnace was hotter to those trembling at home than to the men who plunged through its fierceness! Then there is a certain amount of business to be done—outposts, fatigues, extremely frequent and boring; occasionally too a small foray or reconnaissance, such as a dash towards Springfield, returning with a splendid herd of cattle (December 22); and innumerable little prods at the Boer position by the cavalry, the pop-pop of musketry being heard daily from invisible hollows to

right, front, and left. Daily, too, the big naval guns shell Colenso village and the bridge; watching their fire becomes a regular amusement. Many a bet was made that the slim white line of the bridge would never be hit; the "noes" lost, for on December 19 the neat line was seen to kink and become untidy after a well-aimed shot, the bridge was broken. Christmas came and went, some troops left for Frere, others came up from the packed shipping in Durban harbour, and "quiet day in camp" began to look rather ludicrously frequent in the diaries. And all the time the ranks of little kopjes across the river slumbered in the heat-haze, silent and peaceful, but thronged with life and millions of deaths, only here and there a dark patch, like a wound, upon their smooth flanks to show where the lyddite had smitten in impotent wrath on that blazing, terrible Friday.

The pickets were just standing to arms an hour before dawn on Saturday, January 6, when they heard a single distant cannon-shot come thudding through the dark still air from the north. Then a pause, then another dull boom, then a dozen together, far away, muffled, and ominous. Something must be happening at Ladysmith, but it was not until

some hours later that the big camp learnt what a terrible something it was. As daylight grew the distant firing became heavier, one could see puffs of white smoke bellying from the flat, dim summit of Bulwana, and between the heavy detonations of the big guns a low and continuous growl of musketry. Plain enough that the Boers were making a desperate attempt to storm the town, without the hurried helio messages coming to acquaint General Clery (General Buller was, I think, away on this day) with the position of affairs. "Attacked on every side," then, after a breathless interval, during which the whole army sat on the little knolls outside the camp with telescopes and field-glasses, hoping and fearing to each other in low nervous voices, "enemy everywhere repulsed, fighting continues." A long sigh of relief and pent-up excitement, the distant firing had dwindled to a sullen minute-gun throbbing. Half an hour later the burst of conversation from the anxious watchers was struck suddenly silent by a renewed clamour from the town, the slow booming quickened to a heavy hammering sound, Bulwana's square head became wreathed with snowy smoke, away to the west the growling became louder and a semitone higher. "Attack renewed, enemy reinforced," winked the agitated

helio from Convent Hill. The thousands of watchers were as dumb as an army of ghosts; a terrible thing it was to be of them, hearing that tremendous struggle singing away up there to the north, its roar rising and falling like the beat of the sea across the sixteen miles of hot, soundless air. Then another helio, spelt out painfully by the frowning, staring signallers, "Very hard pressed." Something like a groan ran through the idle mob on the knolls; some shut up their glasses with a snap, and turning, abruptly disappeared without a word into their tents; others continued to peer northwards, catching their breath and saying no word: British generals do not send that sort of message without stern reason. In Heaven's name are we to do nothing? For the only time in the whole campaign I saw an army angry and despondent that day. Where was the General? *was* he a general? If Ladysmith has fallen this day he must be so no longer!

What followed only deepened the indignation and derision. At 1.30 P.M., when the firing at Ladysmith had nearly ceased, the bugles sounded the "alarm" (alarm, forsooth!), and the force fell in for a "demonstration" towards Colenso. There was not a muddle-headed private in the ranks who did not see the egregiousness of it. If Ladysmith

had fallen, of what use could a demonstration be, except to demonstrate what was already obvious, our criminal folly and dilatoriness? If not, was it likely that pressure which would not be felt until evening would cause the enemy to relax his upon his prey? But we demonstrated, nevertheless, feebly and slowly towards the river, with every tactical mistake of Colenso repeated, and some new ones discovered for the occasion. Had the enemy engaged the confused lines, it is probable that another long casualty list would have blocked the cables to England. But he was contemptuously silent, and watched our artillery scientifically missing a herd of wild horses with ill-fused shrapnel. That was a day upon which British arms attained their apogee and perigee, their highest glory and their nearest approach to infamy. Of the latter I have said enough; of the former, of the old-time splendour of the deeds of the Devons, Imperial Light Horse, and other fighting-men on the bullet-swept hills above Ladysmith I have no space here to speak. So much glory should find its chronicler amongst those who won it, not from one who in the most desperate hour of all was standing within sight and sound of it, idle amongst 20,000 unwilling idlers.

On January 10 camp was broken, and a

move made westwards to Pretorius Farm, on the road to Springfield. Buller was going to try again, and every heart beat high: there is nothing like movement to improve *morale;* the host that sweated along the dusty veldt road, past Doornkop, ancient haunt of elephants, was as good or better than it had been before its rib-binder of December 15. Then four days' camp at the farm, with a useless reconnaissance towards Tugela Drift by the infantry, and a most useful one by the cavalry on to the heights overlooking the river at Potgeiter's, which they seized and held. On the 15th to Springfield, and thereafter confusion, hardship, endurance, and hope, culminating in the events hereinafter described.

III.

DIES IRÆ.

In the lives of most men there has been a week at the memory of which ever afterwards a dark cloud comes down and makes a possibly sunny world momentarily a place of gloom. It may have been a week of injury or of crime, of loss of wife, children, or fortune; perhaps of that silent wrestling with spiritual forces which is one of the most common and mysterious visitants of men in a state of education, wherein increasing knowledge battles eternally with increasing doubt and distrust of knowledge. Every man has had this black week in his life,—a week of despair and the sick horror of defeat, of which, as I say, even the reminiscence can put out the sun, and keep one staring dully back into the desperate past until the fit is gone. And what a man experiences an army experiences: not as an agglomeration of men—for to each *homun-*

culus of that mighty *homo*, an army, his own private happenings appear to bulk larger than the vast ones he shares in—but as a soul in itself compact of thousands of souls, all utterly subservient to the interests of the entity in which they are lost and whelmed. Much has been written of the unanimity of mobs in the street. It is as inferior to that of an army as disorder is to discipline, and is only better known because men sit in window-seats, pencil in hand, and quiz a mob wherever collected, whereas an army in action is far from window-seats, and its professional analysts, if it numbers any, are commonly too busy and absorbed to ply their curious trade. But in reality every man in the fighting-line is a moral sympiesometer in himself if he only knew it. What he feels when the first shell bursts at dawn the whole army is feeling; the same at high noon, with its roar of battle and its heat; the same when the firing dies with the dying light in the evening, and friend and foe sink down where they have crouched all day, too weary even to hate any more. All this sounds very unlikely and grotesque, but we assure the unbattled reader that it is true. The emotions that speed along a fighting-line come sometimes almost as a shock to oneself they are so resistless, often so inex-

plicable and disconnected with the actual events in progress. But they come all the same, and come to all at once, and a moment of joy, a week of gloom, to one, is joy or gloom to all.

The general who can create this joy or dissipate the gloom has nothing to learn in his profession. That is what is meant by a "leader of men," and is a thing apart from strategical skill, or even personal popularity. It requires a strength amounting to genius to breast a great wind of emotion which seems to blow whither it listeth, so sudden and sometimes illogical is its direction. The majority are content to be borne along by it, which is but another way of saying that there are more inferior or mediocre generals than good ones,—a fact which might not be considered remarkable had not this war clearly proved that, amongst its junior commissioned ranks, the British army is, judged by this very standard, blessed with more good officers than bad ones.

The army of Natal, surely the most eager and purposeful army which ever took the field, had, in accordance with the aforementioned law, its black week in its short but eventful life. It had, as all the world is aware, very many dark weeks of suspense, danger, and defeat; but one especially, I think, over which the gloom

brooded unrelieved from Saturday to Saturday, when even temporary triumph seemed to give no promise of victory, and defeat itself was silently accepted as the inevitable thing. I refer to the battle of Spion Kop, which did not at all, as many seem to suppose, begin and end with the catastrophe upon the kop itself. The actual fighting, the "rush and hold on" which distinguishes a battle from an engagement, began on Saturday, January 20, and ended when our troops dragged their exhausted limbs back over the Tugela pontoon again in the dawn of Saturday, January 27. Between these two dates the fighting was uninterrupted and dogged, and it is of these seven days of strain, with the thousands charging, firing, dying along the crest of the mountains, that one who was present will think when he hears the battle of Spion Kop mentioned in after-days.

I pass over the various stages of the approach of Buller's army to the battle-ground. They seem, even at this short interval of time, a mere confusion of night-marches, casual bivouacs, and hasty snatches of sleep, with rumour more abundant than rations, and rain abundant enough. Then the pontooning of the ever-present Tugela, an ill-managed crossing—troops and baggage, baggage and troops

—a watchful day on a ridge opposite Fairview Farm, with nothing to watch but a gallant little figure storming Sugar-Loaf Hill all alone,[1] and holding up his hat on the top as a sign of victory in the face of the whole army. Then a chaotic bivouac by Venter's Spruit, when a division might have been the prey of a moderately well-educated company, had the Boer army possessed one; men, horses, oxen in one huge muddle at the bottom of a bowl. Thus two days of idleness, whilst across the valley the Boers were digging for dear life, their labouring figures showing up plainly on the sky-line in the sight of wondering British private and wonderful British general. Then, when Boers were ready and Britons already disconcerted and distrustful—the battle.

John Martin, a genius wellnigh forgotten except amongst dealers and *dilettanti*, is the only artist I know of who could have done justice to the *mise en scène*. On the left a rank of tremendous spurs, stretching out like huge gnarled talons into a fertile yellow valley, like a miser's hand towards a heap of gold. Between the spurs, of which the left one is

[1] This brave man, a trooper of the South African Light Horse, was killed next day by a shell on the very scene of his daring. I regret that I have been unable to find out his name.

the aforementioned Sugar-Loaf Hill, profound recesses and gorges, deep and dark as Tophet, with never a tree or bush to relieve them; at the head of each gorge the bluff face of the main feature, which stretches away towards the enemy's position more or less level. There are four of these spurs and three intervening gorges, and on the right of them the ground runs sharply away back from their alignment into the Boer position itself, curving back again some 2000 yards farther on. In the crescent thus formed lies "Three-Tree Hill," and in prolongation of its farther horn Spion Kop itself, a long, narrow-topped, hog-backed mountain, the thumb of the vast splayed-out hand. Beyond Spion Kop a spacious amphitheatre of level hills, destined to witness the next act in the drama, of which the fatal kop is the left, and Doornkloof the right, with little Vaal Krantz like a mere ant-heap in the centre, all innocent of its coming fame as the most shell-stricken kopje in South Africa. I briefly mention this amphitheatre because, though it has little to do with the coming struggle, a portion of the overflow of the great combat found its way into it, and two battalions of General Lyttelton's brigade at Potgeiter's Drift had to be sent forward to suffer in the final crash.

About 3 P.M. on Saturday, January 20th, the Lancashire and Irish brigades, under General Hart, rushed the two right gorges, with a dash that was positively startling in its unexpectedness. The artillery preparation was a mere form. There was a hasty bang, bang, bang, from the artillery position on Three-Tree Hill, a terrified crackle of musketry from the occupants of the re-entrant, and up from the shadows burst the Irish and North-Countrymen with a typhoon of yells, and a momentum that nothing but death could stop. But death was there: a tremendous fire broke out from the ridge behind, as the cheering soldiers flowed over the level above the re-entrants. The foremost men fell in heaps, the rearmost were stopped, as all should have been stopped, at the crest-line. "Thus far, and no farther," sang the Mausers. "Farther back still," bellowed the French guns, as they tried to whisk the men off their precarious crest-line with well-aimed shrapnel. But the batteries on Three-Tree Hill, six field and two howitzer, have something to say to that, and the ground in front of Hart soon becomes a whirlwind of dust as the shrapnel beats upon it. The grass is set on fire and burns furiously, and all over the battlefield, as if sent by the telegraph-wire,

runs the dreadful news that twenty wounded Boers are being immolated amongst the flames. O Bellona! what were the ancients about when they dubbed you goddess? Or have such devilries only come with enlightened warfare? But the crest-line is ours, and our men cling to it all night, whilst the fire in front of them burns fiercely, and we of the reserve brigade lie chilly out on picket behind the newly won position, watching the red glow in the sky, and wondering who has been killed, and what the morrow will bring forth. Up on the hillside all is comparatively quiet; only an occasional flare of musketry shows how many pairs of eyes and ears are straining through the darkness watching for the slightest movement, all alert even at the rustling of the grass-tufts in the fitful night-wind. It is a lifetime, that clinging to a position won at nightfall throughout the night. The intensity of years is crowded into the sleepless hours, when men can almost feel the thousands of hostile eyes staring towards them, perhaps along rifle-barrels, or through the stalks of the long grass, nervously peering to stem a rush, or stealthily measuring whether the distance is short enough to make one. But there was no movement on either side, though the only sleepers were the British dead, which

lay like seaweed marking the high tide-line of Hart's onset, and the poor charred corpses of the Boers lying hideously on the burnt black grass.

The dawn of Sunday, January 21, was greeted with crash after crash of volleys from the hill-crest. It is a curious thing, but in battles which extend over days there is often a kind of hesitation as to which side is to say "Good morning" to the other first on any particular day, even though the situation is perfectly well known to both. It is very seldom that a line of sangars puts its hands, so to speak, funnel-wise to its mouth and bluntly yells it to its enemy: more often than not the day's work is begun by an apologetic dropping shot or two at long intervals, and it is commonly well on into the morning before the "potting" swells into the rattle and roll which tells that men are hard at it "with their coats off." But there was no doubt at all about this Sunday morning. There is nothing apologetic or doubtful about General Hart to start with, gallant fiery Irishman, too hot with the *ignis sacer* of fighting to see anything ridiculous in a sword angrily brandished at an enemy a thousand yards away. Soldiers under the eye of a man like this do not fire dropping shots, the rifles blaze

and bellow and volley as soon as there is light enough to charge the magazines, their owners ready to speed after that waving sword, forgetting that it is as much an anachronism as the dare-devil recklessness of its owner, careless whether it waves to Ladysmith or to Gehenna. How the volleys peal amongst the gorges and caverns, as the reserve brigade (General Hildyard's) streams forward to take the left re-entrant of the three—three battalions in front, the fourth (the writer's) crowded out for the present, and held in support under a flat-topped kopje on this side of the valley. Over the yellow plain roll the lines of men, a shell or two singing over them and falling at random, with the well-known earthy thump and sulphurous splutter: they reach the base of the mighty ramparts, are lost for a time in the deep recesses between the bastion-hills, and reappear on the summit. There is a scuffle, a blast of musketry like the sound of rending calico, and the ridge, the barbican of the main work behind, is British property.

Why Hart and Hildyard were allowed to win these outworks so easily is not, I think, so much of a mystery as it is made out to be. The Boer main position, an immensely strong one, lay along higher ground about 1200 yards

in rear of the summits of the spurs and gorges I have described, and separated from them by a nearly flat plateau, extending perhaps halfway back before falling away into the big donga which formed, as it were, the ditch of the fortress. The Boers knew well enough that no amount of strength on these outlying ridges could keep the English stormers from the crest-line, and the Boer is not a man who can think with equanimity of almost certain flight across a thousand yards of flat, with a triumphant British division hard on his heels. So, with that extraordinary acumen and appreciation of ground which they have always exhibited, their leaders preferred to forgo the glorious rifle practice possible from the ridges at our troops in their advance across the valley, merely holding the crest with a skeleton line of pickets, whilst the main body lay all ready for the acres of slowly moving Britons they expected to see roll across the intervening plateau. At one time on this day their expectations were in part fulfilled. Some companies of the Queen's and West Yorkshire, ordered to essay what to every eye was the most hazardous of experiments, did rush up over the crest-line on to the naked flat. The roll of fire which greeted them told the result plainly enough,

without the line of bloody stretchers which straggled back across the valley, with here an arm stiffly uplifted like a little mast between the stumbling bearers, or a leg flexed in pain or death. Where will British privates not rush at the word of command? and, in the name of pity, why are such commands given? Men must of course be asked to dare much in battle; but most soldiers will agree with me that in this campaign the knowledge that our soldiers will dare *all* has too often caused them to be sent to do it without sufficient justification. The cruel and ignorant home-bred cackle over the Spion Kop despatches would almost seem to show that the British Public, fond as it is of its soldiers, yet recognises no grain of mercy for them in action, no moment when a general, thinking that the object to be attained is not great enough, certain enough to warrant the certainty of terrible losses, may say, "Hold, enough!" But soldiers know their public, and if the "front" has occasionally been moved to bitterness by the criticisms and cavillings of "home," by the cruelty and ignorance aforementioned, I can answer for it that the obvious ignorance has been always held in calmer moments as excuse for the apparent cruelty, and the only part of such discussions

really deplored is the fact that results made discussion possible. I shall have occasion to refer again to this subject. It is more than a year now since England heard with horror of the days of wrath I am describing; but still the only memorial of the men who died during them is an unjust, unwholesome, and semi-political whispering and winking over the generals, over a Minister who, with a cynicism unparalleled even in a British Cabinet, publicly proclaimed his preference for cooked despatches to raw ones, over a gallant man who, in the eyes of all who know the facts, added immeasurably to his record of gallantry by daring to save a gallant brigade from certain annihilation. But at present all this is premature: to our tale again.

A lull followed the disastrous incident just described: it was of short duration, and was broken into by the first shot of six days' continual sniping and volley-firing. All along the ridge ran the steady roll of fire, from behind low sangars, big boulders, from little depressions, sometimes dying away in portions of the line, sometimes redoubling in intensity throughout its length, as if by common impulse. Now a company would top the orchestra with rhythmic volleys, whilst the thousands of free-lances on either side stayed their hands for a moment as

if to listen: then the independent firing would recommence, rifle by rifle, until the rhythm of the volleys was drowned in the tremendous rattle: then two or three Maxims would chime in, and the whole ridge resounded from end to end, peak calling to peak, ravine to ravine. What a study in diacoustics! Living for four days amid such a storm is apt to produce fancies, a sort of aural *fata morgana*. I became aware that the note permeating a battle is one endless E flat. How it sings and drones throughout the long days, audible, or rather sensible, amid the many-toned hubbubs around, dropping occasionally a third of a tone, but always reascending to its endless semibreve. It is the same in a storm at sea, only there the note is higher, more *aigu*, and not nearly so sad and menacing as the voice of the battlefield.

It was to this crashing accompaniment of musketry that the writer's battalion moved forward in the late afternoon to relieve a regiment upon the crest-line. A shell or two wide of the mark, and a sprinkling of bullets dropping almost perpendicularly, were all the notice taken of our unseen but doubtless signalled advance. Evening was just falling when we entered the deep gorge, at the top of which lay the battalion we had come to relieve. It was a curious and

depressing spectacle. Imagine a huge basin of blackish-brown earthenware, with sides so steep that your neck is strained as you look up from your position at the bottom of it. From the encircling rim are darting innumerable spurts of flame, looking almost scarlet against the darkening sky: these are from the rifles of the men clinging like flies to the crest-line. All around a casual "whit! whit!" more felt than heard, as the Mauser bullets whisk down at the end of their flight and plop into the soft earth, or strike with a crisp spit upon a boulder. There are not very many of them now, for the Boers are "easing off" after a hard day, and we are sending them ten Lee-Metfords for one Mauser across the plateau. The relief is soon effected. We climb up the stony wall, the released battalion stumbles wearily past us, and disappears in the gloom behind to its well-earned rest, all save one of its officers, who refuses to go until he has found some of his dead still lying out upon the plateau. He pokes about in the darkness in front of us, at the hazard of his life, finds the horrors he is looking for, and on his return joins us in a hasty candlelight dinner, with as much unconcern as if he had been out mushroom-picking. Wonderful the adaptability of human nature, which can handle death as if it were but

the complement of life, or a casual part of it, instead of being its counterbuff!

The night passed quietly, with only an occasional spasm of firing from our crest-line; but, as before, the first glint of dawn on the 22nd was fairly roared at from all along the line. During the night the enemy had got a couple of guns in position on our left front, and these, accurately ranging with shrapnel, cracked and splashed their rain of bullets over our heads all day, though the slope was luckily too steep for effective results. Then another gun opened from the invisible right, also a pom-pom, whose procession of little shells raced across the flat below us at intervals, sometimes amongst the ambulance or the mules, once causing a universal catch of the breath by plunging straight into the midst of men, drivers, bearers, ration-carriers, &c. But the pom-pom's mission in life is to prove that the age of miracles is not past, and the ten little deaths found interstices in the crowd somehow, and no one was hurt. As a check to this display of artillery on the part of the enemy, a battery of howitzers trotted over from Potgeiter's, and at once came into action on a hill to our left rear, coughing away an unconscionable number of rounds in record time, but never once silencing the far-off bump!

bump! which warned us on the hill-crest that another shell was sailing towards us. And so on all day, a featureless day; for there was not an instant's cessation or slackening of the fire, the only occurrence that could have been called a feature in such a dead level of noise. Not an inch of ground gained, nor an inch lost; not a hint in any one's mind as to how the master-mind on Three-Tree Hill proposed to work out his climax. Then the night, an exact counterpart of the previous one, with the same yell of musketry at dawn, and the same visitations of shrapnel and pom-poms. Never was there such a dull battle, or one so wearing to mind and body. About 3 P.M. on this day, the 23rd, the writer's battalion was ordered back, and, after a cheerless night's bivouac in the valley, was sent across on the morning of the 24th to Three-Tree Hill "to support the attack on Spion Kop." So something had happened after all! From our bivouac we had seen a brigade forming up at dusk under the shadow of the great kop, evidently for a night attack "or something"; but where and what was a mystery, until, just before we were starting for our new position, sights began to appear on the summit of the mountain which explained all. Spion Kop had been seized in the night.

One has learnt this much of caution in South Africa, to describe—nay, believe—nothing that one has not seen with one's own eyes. War-correspondents with one voice have proclaimed that no war has ever been worse conducted than this one: it is a fair retort that no war has ever been worse reported. If the tongue is an unruly member, much more so is the ear which drinks in the gossip of inventive non-commissioned officers and camp-followers, and the hand which welds the farrago into enormous volumes of misinformation and unfairness, the only truthful representation found from cover to cover being the photograph of the author opposite the title-page. What the writer saw of the fight on the summit of Spion Kop was little enough; but it *was* enough,—enough, at any rate, to have rendered the subsequent recrimination and insinuation dreadful to the mind of a mere soldier in its unfairness and duplicity. As we started from our bivouac towards the fatal kop all was comparatively quiet on its summit. The stormers, having won the hill after a brief scuffle with a surprised picket, were busy rearranging the confusion of a night-advance, and piling up sangars with the few loose stones available: the enemy, much disconcerted for the moment, were quarrelling in

the background as to their next move. Some were for retreat, others for a counter-attack, a difference of opinion subsequently split by a retirement of the whole of the Boer transport. Only a few hardy spirits lay on the far end of the ridge, waiting in the truest spirit of soldiery for "something to turn up." Over all lay a dense mist, and a quiet which was curiously contrasted with the far-off volleys from the spurs and gorges of our left attack. Then the sun rose, and the mists fled before it, first from the green hollows and kloofs, then fading from the steep hillside, the boulders appearing wet and glistening beneath it, then from the summit itself. When the last filmy coil had disappeared, one could see the crowded figures of the British force like little black marionettes against the light-blue sky, and how thick they appeared! Surely the summit must be very narrow if but one brigade must huddle together in this manner, a mark such as artillerymen dream of, but seldom hope to see in waking moments. The Boer artillerymen (no dreamers these) see them almost as soon as we do. A boom from the high ground, which ran like the crosspiece of a T across the line of the kop, a puff of woolly smoke in the air, and a shrapnel-shell, timed to a fraction, has swept through the pack upon the hill-top. Then

the rifle-fire began, sharp, angry, incessant, from every crevice and every knoll: to us below the whole mountain seemed alive with noise. Then more shrapnel, strings of it, dotting the cobalt sky with balls of smoke as if a giant hand were flinging snowballs into the air, whilst beneath the mob of tiny figures swayed and shook, disintegrated and re-formed into packs in a manner terrible to see to one who knows what the lash of shrapnel is like. Now a trio of shells would burst at the rear end of the mob, which appeared to surge forward a little, reducing the depth of the target; then another placed with diabolical skill in advance of the first; the men in rear edged still farther forward, until a solid mass of humanity stood relieved upon the sky-line. Quick as a flash the whole Boer battery was upon them, bang! bang! bang! bang! a storm of projectiles tore into the black lump, which broke up into agitated patches, some edging forwards, some back, some disappearing altogether, as the men composing them fell lifeless below our line of vision. Again the same performance, shells behind, more forward, herding their victims on to the slaughter-ground for the *coup-de-grâce* of that appalling salvo. Splendid gunnery, but a frightful spectacle in all its silhouetted clearness up there on the razor-

backed ridge, visible to the angry pitying eyes of the whole army. Meantime the artillery on Three-Tree Hill and the big naval ordnance over Potgeiter's blazed and thundered and roared their best and hardest, at first methodically, with calculation and much confabulation and levelling of telescopes, then impatiently, then wildly and despairingly. Will those Boer guns never stop! You may take it on the word of a gunner that each of them has been fairly hit at least six times; but still the booming from Heaven knows where, and the balls of smoke, "soft as carded wool," over the summit of Spion Kop. Even the pom-poms — whose lairs must be less hard to locate, since five-and-thirty different officers hurry up during the day to point out the exact position in five-and-thirty different places—add their stream of shells without let or hindrance to the avalanche falling upon the unfortunate men of Woodgate's brigade, the stormers of yesterday, the sufferers to-day. Poor General Woodgate himself is sharing it to the full: a bullet in the head, weeks of pain, and a grave in the peaceful little kirkyard of Mooi river,—such is the price too many another gallant man must pay when doctors or generals disagree, and have recourse to experiments. Then the mist and the night came down together: the firing ceased;

but the weary thousands below, on Three-Tree Hill, in the gorges, and on the mighty escarpments, slept not a wink for fear of what might befall the stricken hundreds on the kop.

That night the hill was evacuated. All through the dark hours grey-faced men stole down from the summit, gaunt, dirty, utterly weary, but undefeated, and perhaps hardly aware how much they owed to the man whose courageous order had saved them from annihilation. To the onlooker the debt was plain enough, and the whole British army, as well as the fraction of it which left Spion Kop that night, owes it to Colonel Thorneycroft that the catastrophe, characteristically described by him as "the mop-up in the morning," is only a might-have-been in our military history. The attempt and its execution must stand for ever as that which in a commander is worse than a crime — a blunder. The army knows well enough who is to blame for that; but it is as well that the rest of the world should remain in ignorance, even if it should mean the prolongation of the pitiable discussion, for the burden of the responsibility for such a tragedy is too heavy for one man to bear in public.

Next morning saw us (the writer's battalion) still on Three-Tree Hill, under the shadow of

the kop. Looking up to the clear-cut hog's back of its summit, one could see single figures moving leisurely about where yesterday a shell-riven crowd of hundreds had swayed and shifted. These slow-moving figures were those of the Boers wandering amongst the dead, who lay in serried packs behind many of the paltry sangars. A few shots rang out from odd corners of the vast mass, and then there was silence. An armistice had been arranged, to allow of the ghastly heaps left from the thresh-ing of the day before being swept up and hidden. All day the work went on, doctors came and went, men could be seen digging against the clear sky, and every now and then a stretcher black with blood, containing some-thing alive but not to be looked on, would be carried past the foot of the hill. Shells are unlovely killers and wounders: but for them there would be but little of the butcher's-shop suggestion about a modern battlefield, with its clean-puncturing rifle-bullets. But wherever the shells shriek and whirr will be crouching heaps of shattered humanity behind spattered stones, and the rent dismembered bodies in the stretchers. Near us lay one of the bat-talions from the kop, a quiet brooding mass of men, sitting for the most part as motionless

as carved images about the piled arms. That regiment is over two hundred years old, and was baptised at Dettingen; but its baptism in the Low Countries will be forgotten long before the fiery confirmation on these cursed kopjes of Natal. It may be a new theory to military philosophers, that it is the manner more than the number of the losses caused by any visitation which renders it a thing to live horribly in the memory for ever. There could have been little of the horrible when men galloped joyously at each other lance in rest, or stoutly faced each other afoot, eyes watching eyes over the bayonet-point, every muscle alive to the splendid sport of fighting: nothing repulsive in this, though it is true that ten fell to the steel to one who now collapses at the blow of a bullet or the whirling fury of a shell. But even when only 300 are swept and blasted off the face of the earth by modern shells, the incident (ye gods! Spion Kop *has* been called "an incident" in the halfpenny papers!) seems to be taken out of the realm of warfare into that of railway accidents, explosions, &c., and one reads of and witnesses them with much the same sort of sick horror as came upon one at the news of that most awful of modern catastrophes, the fire in the bazaar in Paris. But

this is a digression, for which my excuse must be another novel but irrefutable theory, that the memory of bygone battles renders a man more thoughtful and analytic than any other experience of life: they may truly be called the contemplative man's education, and one may see even in Napier's magnificent work how impossible it is for an eyewitness to describe the fights of civilised men without becoming dreamy and irrelevant.

Towards evening it became known that the British army was to retire, and the whole attempt to be abandoned. The left was to fall back first—that is to say, those on the ridges farthest from Spion Kop—and the whole force to march towards two pontoon-bridges thrown across the Tugela, guided thither by huge bonfires lighted at the head of each. Hardly were the orders issued when it began to rain, and what rain! Cold, pitiless, incessant, it drenched the thin khaki drill in five minutes (no one had anything but the summer clothing he stood in), and in five more converted thousands of perspiring men into shivering chattering ranks of misery. To the writer's battalion fell the task of covering the retirement. At night tactics have a way of reverting to first principles, and it was almost

by instinct that the indistinct rectangles of the companies shook themselves out into a single rank stretching from end to end of the hill, the men shoulder to shoulder, — a frail enough buffer, one would think, between two hostile armies. The movement accomplished, there was a momentary pause amongst the dark upright figures, then with a subdued rustle they disappeared; a mile of men had lain down to wait. Hour after hour crouched the long line on the sodden ground in the downpour in absolute silence, immobility, and wretchedness, officers and men stretched out so still amongst the mud and wet stones that the long row of them looked more like a dark furrow in the ground than a thousand armed men. The darkness was intense. Every now and then a suspicious noise ahead, distinguished in a second from the subdued bustle of the retreat in progress behind, would galvanise the frozen limbs into a momentary alertness. Then even this failed; men became actually insensible or silly from the cold, and had to be propped and lifted up to obey an order. Every moment an attack was expected, and only a fence of men in single rank to keep the enemy off the tail of the retiring army. That fence once broken, and a clear field given to the Boer sharpshooters

nothing could have saved Buller's army from the direst confusion in its difficult march over the slippery muddy tracks towards the pontoons. But ahead all was silent as the grave, not a movement visible on the dark ridges, dimly seen through the shroud of fast-falling rain. Could even hate or fear bring men to huddle along those lonely melancholy hills on such a night, in water-logged trenches, with clammy rusting rifles in hand, when every instinct yearns for companionship and a crackling fire, from which one may look comfortably over one's shoulder out into the wild misery of a wet night on the veldt? And so the hours wore on.

Suddenly, about 11 P.M., a terrific blare of musketry burst like an explosion from the whole length of the enemy's position. From every trench leapt a solid line of white fire from the inky blackness, and the whisper of the rain was drowned in the well-known roar of Mausers, re-echoing across the empty valleys and kloofs like the break of the sea against a caverned cliff,—a magnificent sight and sound, but not a comforting one to us, who had hoped that the Boers were asleep, and not every man "armed, keeping his place." For a quarter of an hour the roll of fire pealed out in the silence, and the shooting flame danced along

the dark hill-crest ahead of us, and then—as suddenly—silence and black darkness. I remember, even in that acme of anxiety, thinking how foolish those Dutchmen must be feeling as each man laid down his rifle after having sent fifty good rounds at express speed into—nothing! The reason of the outburst was obvious enough. Hearing the murmur and rustle from our lines, the Boers—perfect anomalies in their heaviness of body and "jumpiness" of nerve—had pictured to themselves a night-attack. "Hark to that distant trampling of feet and rumbling of gun-wheels!" they said; "the Brit is at his old game: let us give him time, and smash him when he shall have arrived at the foot of this our hill, as we did at Magersfontein, as we would have done at Ladysmith had not Erasmus been cursed with a head as thick as the breeches of the guns he lost."[1] So they waited till they could wait no longer, and perhaps a quarter of a million rounds found their billet in the wet ground in the valley

[1] When during the siege of Ladysmith an expedition from inside the town attacked Surprise Hill at night, and blew up the two guns upon it, the Boers threw the whole blame on Erasmus, who was in command of the hill, and had refused to believe repeated warnings given him by his outposts of the approach of British troops.

dividing the respective positions, for not one came near us. At the height of the outburst there was a hurried trampling and rush of feet ahead of us; a whisper went along the frozen line of men, "They are coming!" and chattering teeth were clenched, and blue fingers gripped hard at the dripping rifles. Woe unto any Dutchman who had ventured on that barrier of fierce and angry men, lying sullen and vengeful, motionless as a line of dark corpses on the sodden ground! One almost trembles at the thoughts and feelings aroused by that trampling of feet in the darkness—red thoughts which ran from man to man, and set the blood on fire in the shivering bodies. There are voices in the air over a line of silent soldiers awaiting an attack at night, and when the enemy draws near one of them falls to whispering "Kill! kill!" until even the cowards, if there are any, become butchers. But these were not Boers hurrying towards us over the stones, but some men of a battalion lost in the darkness, retiring in confusion and amazement from before that sheet of flame spurting from the hill-crest behind them. Nearer and nearer came the sound of them, and the battalion, lying prone and serried in their course, still

waiting sternly for Boers, were just about to draw back the bayonets "half-arm" for the first fierce lunge when the identity of the wanderers was discovered. They were hastily gathered into batches, and re-formed behind the comforting solidity of that immovable single rank. It dawns upon officers that their men have just been tried as highly as man can be tried in war. Pierced with cold, lying out in the open with no cover in front and none to fall back on behind, no supports, and the rest of the army in full retreat far away back in the gloom; then the rush of men and the leaping figures ahead, Boers for all they knew, and all around the dripping, steaming, dense blackness of the night, hiding even evil-memoried Spion Kop itself, though it hung closely over them, — soldiers have rarely had to stand their ground against a greater temptation (ever present in night-combats) to break and disappear, unseen and unquestioned, into the friendly darkness behind them. But no one is surprised. Were the whole Boer army, the amorphous mysterious thousands who have lain so long behind the kopjes, to come thundering over the flat upon that silent black streak of men, they would have to recoil many a time cruelly handled

before they could obliterate it and pour onward over the place where it had been. After this another period of deathly stillness, accentuated rather than broken by the ceaseless rustle of the rain and the far-away murmur of the great army pressing towards the bridges.

At length, somewhere about 1 A.M., the whispered order came to retire. Like black phantoms the long line of men rose from the ground — all save one or two whom the cold had struck stiff and senseless where they lay, to be hastily picked up and placed on stretchers. Stealthily the companies closed upon their right, and moved off one by one, men's teeth clenched and feet contracted in the soaked chilly boots in a very desperation of attempted silence and secrecy. But the black hill-crest behind remained black, and no blaze of rifle-fire came at the sound of the hundreds of hobnailed boots stumbling over the stones. What a march that was, back over a stony quagmire down to the pontoon! The mud was as slippery as ice and ankle-deep; every second came the clatter of a falling man or a struggling horse, every second a sudden check to the slow-moving column, when rear-ranks would cannon heavily with smothered blasphemy into their comrades

of the rank in front. Here and there a stifled cry would tell of a sprained ankle, and a form would be carried out from the midst of the press to await the arrival of a stretcher. Every hundred yards or so the dark form of a horseman loomed up, motionless as a statue, cloaked and dripping: these were the mounted men distributed along the track to mark its course,—one of the admirable precautions of an admirably conducted retirement. About 4 A.M., just as dawn broke over the swollen dismal Tugela, the bridge was reached, and as the last battalion tramped over the worn-out "chesses"[1] which swayed sicklily beneath the moving weight, a single shell sang drearily from the enemy's position away back in the mist, and fell with a splash into the thick water alongside. It was like the full stop at the end of a chapter, such a chapter as the British army has never had to write before—a chapter of failure and sorrow, unrelieved save by the ceaseless heroism of the dead and living whose duty it had been to write it. Pity 'tis that that last solitary shell did not put a period to the disastrous chatter, as it did to the disaster itself. Soldiers, at

[1] The planks which form the roadway of pontoon and other temporary bridges.

least, do not wish to be reminded by quarrelsome irresponsibles how much duplicity and subterfuge has clustered round the sacred and dignified mournfulness of those days of wrath.

IV.

A BEATEN ARMY.

A SORRY sight was that beaten army in its camp between Waggon Drift and Potgeiter's when daylight broke; muddy, dripping khaki, rusty rifles, helmets almost melted by the rain, are not martial adjuncts. But the spirits of all were undamped, either by rain, wretchedness, or defeat; the cheeriness of the sodden host was as remarkable as their appearance, and the feat of a certain general officer, who chose the time, after a week's close fighting and a cruel night-march, to make his inspection of the regimental kitchens, could only arouse good-humoured laughter instead of the tears to which it seemed equally entitled. No more pathetic attempt to plant Aldershot in Armageddon has ever been made! Not altogether ludicrous when one had divined its purpose, as a steadier in the midst of what the perpetrator wrongly imagined must be

chaos, any more than the same officer's later and choicer *chef d'œuvre*, that of calling out and reprimanding a subaltern for his careless method of carrying his carbine what time the army was on the march towards the bloody kopjes of Vaal Krantz!

But there was no chaos, and on January 29 the brigades swung into hollow squares to hear Sir Redvers' speeches as smartly as ever they had done on Laffan's Plain before royalty. Lavater would have been puzzled by that square impassive face, as the General thanked his men for what they had done, and for having shown him what to do. Never a soul of the thousands there, nor, it appears, of the millions at home, understood his abrupt, cryptic sayings; but they, nevertheless, lifted a weight from hearts unconsciously heavy, *omne ignotum pro magnifico.*

Sir Redvers Buller is fortunate in at least one of the attributes proper to a general, a good presence and appearance. Huge, heavy, solid, and reliable to look upon, he conveys to the imagination something of that comfort derivable from the sight of a big gun or a strong intrenchment. Most difficult of men to describe: impassive as Helvellyn, yet notoriously tender, with heart bleeding for his falling soldiers; de-

termined as fate, yet faltering before the blows of what seemed to be fate; bravest of the brave, yet a very woman in the face of certain losses; physically as hard as the basalt he, with his wealth and beautiful Devonshire home, slept upon, yet thinking overmuch of food and comforts for his men, unwilling to move until these were assured, — with these failings one can understand his reverses, but cannot one also understand how the love of his men clung to him even when divorced from trust? Such a man could do anything with soldiers, if he could but invent anything to do. Experts say that General Buller achieved the former without having attained the latter; not by any means all blame this, for he who can do a great deed with scarce a glimmer of genius save the capacity for taking pains (far removed from genius, *pace* high authority) must have strong fires of another sort in his composition. Too much blame has been accorded this fine Englishman outside of the army, where of his task only the magnitude of his failures will ever be really known; too much praise perhaps from within its ranks, where only the magnitude of his difficulties and his manly calmness amid them was, or ever will be, properly appreciated. Striking a balance, it must be admitted that a man who

could by a short unintelligible address send his defeated and diminished army merry and confident back to camp, as he did on that Monday afternoon, is an anomaly of no small military value. Such a man can always banish the despair his desperate ventures have earned, and the generals with like powers in history are to be counted upon the fingers of one hand.

After this a rest of four days, during which small reinforcements arrived, a few guns, a few cavalry, about 1200 raw infantry from England, who were hastily drilled to something like acquaintance with their weapons. Composed as they were of young recruits and the oldest of old reservists, it was curious to see them toiling at the firing exercise in full view of the terrible kop on which so many hundreds of their comrades lay dead. The pickets could see the Boers wandering over its lofty summit all day, and once or twice the figure of a woman appeared, gay in a white piqué frock and red parasol, seated complacently on the very spot at which the dead must have lain thickest. Strange nation, whose sons could fight like lions though domestic as cats, who on returning from the trenches, where they had been battered all day, went to rest in laagers full of women and washing, as untidy and unwarlike as their own

backyards. Women were seen behind the kopjes at Colenso and Vaal Krantz; there were some, smartly habited and well horsed, even with the raiding party which from Mooi river kept Pietermaritzburg awake and alarmed. Two girls were actually killed at Pieter's Hill—one, poor thing, whispering just before she died that her husband had kept her beside him in the trench "because she was a good shot." The tragedy of the world's war has no sadder, more awful scene than these trenches full of the most primitively manly race on earth, unable to wrench itself away from its women, carrying them everywhere, more cared for than caring, leaning upon them as the truest virility has always leaned on women. I have met Boers who have been ashamed of this trait, and Britons who have cursed them for indulging it in war; there is no need. Its very beauty is evinced by the ineffable pathos and pity of it when it is found in such savage surroundings, and sorrow for the poor women may go hand in hand with loftier sentiments when their point of view can be grasped. *Pro aris et focis* has become an unctuous quibble to us who have never been in danger. I am convinced that to almost every fighting Boer it has been the sternest of realities, before him always in letters of fire. Upon the

flags of all nations are to be found different symbols — unity, conquest, religion, &c.; but even an enemy has been able to see waving in front of this farmer army a dingy oriflamme displaying a tiny, lonely farmhouse with a white-aproned figure in the gateway. Ludicrous, of course, but whole lanes of dead men in khaki and corduroy prevent one smiling overmuch.

It was known to all where the next attempt was to be made, and many rode to the top of Mount Alice—the only plum left to us of the great cake we had cut into—to spy out the land and to return shaking their heads, refusing to speak lest they should prognosticate evil. From the gun position one could look down upon line upon line of trenches and a dark shifting crowd of figures about them; the Boers knew, too, it appeared! In the early morning it was a strange sight to see the thousands of blankets stretched out to dry in the sun in front of the enemy's trenches, their owners loafing and lolling about, or crouching in circles round kettles. And all the time our big guns were, by command, silent, though many a splendid target presented itself. Once a terrible rumour went stealthily round the camp that Ladysmith had surrendered; later another, that it was relieved; both believed for the moment, bringing men from their tents in a

fever. Whispers evil and good were likewise wafted from Kimberley and Mafeking, both lost and relieved in turn by the lying jade. There was much talk and speculation, too, as to the mighty gathering of Britons in progress at Ramdam; what was it going to do, and in how many weeks would it appear behind Ladysmith? not a few thinking that the relief would be effected thus, not being over-hopeful that the Natal army would ever be able to thread the tremendous ranges ahead. But all talk and speculation were ended when, on Sunday, February 4, tents were packed again, and the army, streaming away northwards into a maze of ravines and watercourses, forgot everything but its own stern and perilous business.

V.

CHARITY.

Scene—A deep wooded gorge abutting on the winding Tugela below Mount Alice. *Dramatis personæ*—30,000 men, with several things on their minds, preparing to bivouac. *Time*—Hot still nightfall on February 4, 1900. Such was a glimpse, as it were, into the "flies" before the curtain was rung up on the great spectacular drama of Vaal Krantz, General Buller's third attempt at the relief of beleaguered Ladysmith—third, most exhausting, and most hopeless, most often thought of by those who strove in the bloody trio, perhaps most worthy of thought in its squandered gallantry, endurance, and discipline. Judged by the evangelical aphorism, it was in other ways the greatest of the three failures which, whilst almost unnerving England, nerved her retreating soldiers to a pitch of absolute unconquerableness on the triumphant

anniversary of Majuba. Colenso was Faith, absolute Faith: defeat was impossible; the only doubt of victory its extent, whether it would not by its completeness dash to the ground the hopes of many comrades still upon the seas in a frenzy of expectancy, ardour, and suspense. Spion Kop was—until it began—Hope itself. This was the way to do it; could men believe their eyes when they saw the right way so wrongly taken that Hope lay a-dying at the very wicket-gate? But Vaal Krantz was pure Charity. It never could have succeeded; men say it was never meant to succeed, being but a stop-gap or semibreve interpolated by the big, plodding, puzzled player, all astray amidst the intricacy of the tremendous music he was called upon to perform, yet unwilling to be altogether silent. Macaulay's schoolboy (cock-sure child of how delightfully cock-sure a parent) would have seen at a glance the absurdity of the position tenanted for two terrific days by but one passive brigade of the whole eager army. His father, whilst recording his youthful scorn, would have borne limpid and nervous testimony to the heroism of that battered unit. It was pure Charity, suffering long, enduring all things, that generals at their wits' end might pull themselves together; most of all that Ladysmith, now wellnigh choked

in the unceasing hug of its adversary, might feel his strong arms loosen a little as he felt the blows redoubling from without.

Hence this army, lately marched from Spearman's camp, in the wooded gorge below Mount Alice, with two heavy reverses to brood upon with that portion of its mind which craniologists, and others addicted to the pastime of destroying the mystery of the human body without adding to its beauty, aver to be solely given over to things of the past, and in the future the possible cataclysm of the surrender of the division now known to be *in extremis* in the invested town. Something must be done, good or bad; nothing good appeared, so this army cheerfully set itself to illustrate bravely and with blood, for scoffers and the text-books of the future, the very worst strategical attempt at doing nothing for Charity's sake ever attempted with live men and live shells.

In attempting to describe the ground upon which the battle of Vaal Krantz took place, it is impossible to get away from the trite simile of a theatre, a magnificent theatre with five square miles of stage, and for auditorium an immense half-moon of green hills and ridges. Battles are not commonly fought on such spectacular country, for fine levels leading up to high ground mean

heavy losses to the attackers, and the utter impossibility of anything but the most bull-headed of tactics. Vaal Krantz was perhaps the most picturesque battle ever fought; it was also the most ridiculous tactically. The Boer position was strong beyond description. Overlooking our left towered lofty Spion Kop, overlooking our right the still loftier Doornkloof, whilst Brakfontein, a ridge of lower elevation, joined the two with a long sweeping semicircle, entrenched from ridge to base; heavy guns on Spion Kop, heavier guns on Doornkloof, guns of all sorts between, 3-inch Creusots, pom-poms, a curious nondescript firing segment shell, 7-pounders, 15-pounders, and perhaps 10,000 rifles,—never was there an army with a more varied *répertoire* than this of Louis Botha's, nor was commander ever blessed with ground more favourable to the best use of each weapon, or with an enemy more certain to draw upon himself the full capacity of each. Vaal Krantz itself, a mere foothill, almost indistinguishable beneath the heights beyond, lies nearly inside the right or eastern horn of the mighty crescent; below it flows the Tugela with many a convolution as it worries its way through the eastern hills, but taking a course nearly directly north and south back towards Mount Alice and Potgeiter's Drift. Along its

right bank runs, first the beautiful leafy road, and beyond the steep wooded heights of Schwartz Kop, whose terraces of solid dark green had been occupied by Lord Dundonald for some days. Away back at Potgeiter's Drift British troops were already across the river, holding a hummocky little kopje three miles from all parts of the Boer position as a bridge-head to the pontoon behind them. Behind the kopje squatted a battery of 5-inch guns; upon Mount Alice, behind and across the river, lived the 4·7's; and along the terraces and in the dense woods of Schwartz Kop men were straining and hauling all night at steel hawsers, until with almost superhuman labour heavy ordnance was actually perched upon the flat summit, a sight almost as wonderful to behold as the terrible work they did next day. Alack that man's greatest efforts should be made for the destruction of his kind! the strength, skill, and endurance which are given to his greatest works of mercy are but languid in comparison.

Meanwhile the host, hidden away in the wooded gorge below Mount Alice, slumbered beneath the trees through the short beautiful summer's night; dark forms everywhere — in the long grass, behind boulders, under

waggons; over all absolute silence, and the aroma of a South African valley yielding up in the darkness the scented heat of the blazing day before. One of the punishments for passions intrinsically evil is that objects intrinsically lovely and joyous connected with them can become hateful or sad. Men have been known to loathe women, or flowers, or certain beautiful melodies, from recollections called up by each. War is a passion intrinsically evil: no man of the Natal army will ever inhale the heavy, sensuous, almost gorgeous, smell of hot crushed grass and mimosa without a vision of bursting shells and writhing bodies coming before his eyes, and the sound of smothered shrieks to his ears.

Réveillé at 4 A.M.; a bright bustling morning; all the valley alive with the sound and movement of thousands of men astir and setting about breakfast. Not a word of battles and murder and sudden death; the hillside, five minutes after the men had been roused, resembled an immense picnic, with its groups of pals breakfasting amicably in circles — the thoughtless more thoughtless than ever, the thoughtful less thoughtful than at bed-time the night before. About 6 A.M. the "fall in" sounded, and a few moments later the long

column was filing down the steep valley. As each company debouched from its depths a universal "Oh!" of admiration from its hundred mouths greeted the vastness and splendour of the suddenly unfolded view, followed in many cases by a low whistle as the tremendous strength of the enemy's position dawned upon the staring men. There it was, the swimming plain with its rampart of green heights, the former to be crossed, the latter to be won: it needed no Jomini to see the difficulties of both, nor did a man deserve to be called an alarmist who proclaimed them both impossible. But the towering crags of Schwartz Kop on the right, with the big guns so cleverly concealed in their forests, were a comforting factor, and as usual all men hoped the best. The first portion of the advance of the column —Hildyard's, Hart's, and Lyttelton's brigades— lay along the right bank of the river, under the leafy avenue which fringes the stream on its left, and the rocky bush-covered foot of Schwartz Kop on its right. What a lovely walk for a man in peace-time, rod in hand instead of rifle, compassing the death of a few fat trout, and not, as now, licking his dry lips with the thought and hope of a bloody holocaust of living men! The sun was now high

in the heavens, and as the troops marched along under the cool checkered shadows of the trees, pipes in mouths, collars loosened, they began to wonder somewhat when the show would begin. That there was to be a "show" no one doubted: two lessons had sufficed to explode the myth that the "Boers would never stand," which no men had bruited about in the early days more confidently than the Colonials, whose chief boast it had been that they, and they alone, knew the Dutchman and how things should be done. Suddenly the well-known voice of a 4·7 gun roared from the summit of Mount Alice behind us, followed by another and another. It was the showman's gong! "Walk up! walk up! ye who would witness mighty things; there is no charge, unless Fortune, mistress of the show, should suddenly call upon you for the fee of your life!" Boom! boom! What is amiss with Brakfontein that its round green cheeks grow haggard and rugged, emitting flame and ochreous smoke? Boom! boom! See the great jagged slits that appear beneath the blows of the lyddite, and the brown bruises that start out from the emerald slopes when a shell, having dived with a yell into the soft turf, bursts with muffled thunder and rends its prison into a thousand

fragments. Boom! boom! A trench has been fairly hit, and up into the air spouts a geyser of madder brown, with black somethings in its jet, which the marching Britons, with low savage grunts of approval, hope are legs and arms. It is a terrible thing modern heavy gun-fire, so terrible that its archetype the thunder-storm has at last been ousted from its place as a simile of wrath and grandeur; so terrible that it is impossible to despise the human race which numbers men who can endure—ay, and keep their nerve and rage—under its appalling visitations. Up on Schwartz Kop the long guns have not yet spoken; they are to be a surprise sprung upon the enemy when the real knot of the day comes to be tackled. How portentous is the silence of the great green crag! We who know with what it is tenanted think strange thoughts as the shells from Mount Alice sing over our heads. How grimly the long silent tubes lurk amongst the trees, watching the work of their comrades already in action, and perhaps whispering each one to his mighty brother, "Fine work, fine work; but wait!"

Meanwhile we of the riverside column have left the trees behind us, and move out into an open U-shaped plain lying in a bend of the river, which has turned sharply away from our

left towards Brakfontein, to reappear again close to our right under the forward foot of Schwartz Kop. About 2000 yards in front, at the central point of the bend, lies Vaal Krantz itself—a hog-backed kopje of huge boulders, backed by the long lowering sweep of Brakfontein, curving away to the westward and to the eastward,—first a level plain with Munger's Farm like a little island in the midst of it, then the high green billows of Doornkloof rising crest above crest, completely dominating the whole expanse below it. As we settled down in the blazing sunshine for what turned out to be a wait of hours, Schwartz Kop spoke at last, and out from the thickets on its summit rushed a 4·7 shell towards Brakfontein, to join its comrades from Mount Alice. At the same time two or three batteries of 15-pounders, drawn up on our right, opened a tremendous fire upon Vaal Krantz itself—every gun of the long line booming in turn, until the sound of them was like the rhythmic thumping of a big drum. No Paradise that rocky fortress even now, but comfortable compared to the hell it will be—tenable only by devils, not men. And now, for the first time, a hint as to the plan of attack is conveyed to the waiting battalions. There is first of all to be a feint attack delivered against the face of Brak-

fontein across the level plain; General Wynne's brigade (late poor General Woodgate's, *pro patria mortuus*) has been left behind at Potgeiter's for this purpose. It is to bear all the semblance of reality, and will be all but pushed home, drawing—it is hoped—the bulk of the enemy from their widespreading intrenchments to a point opposite the threatened danger. This accomplished, a dash is to be made for Vaal Krantz—a pontoon is at this moment being laid just below us at Munger's Drift under a brisk rifle fusilade, over which the assaulting columns will pass,—another dash upon a green hill to the east of Vaal Krantz, and then—but then the hints did not even venture to hint: apparently, like the operations they foreboded, they died a lingering death at this stage, for there was no word of complementary or supporting movements by other portions of the force.

But things are getting too exciting to inquire: the feint attack has already begun—the finest sight of the war, perhaps of any war. Heralded by a tremendous blast of artillery big and little, which smote upon Brakfontein like the blows upon an anvil—dinting it, battering its smooth edge into irregular and smoking crenelations, finally setting it ablaze from summit to base, one dull red hill of flame, General Wynne's long

lines stole out from behind the kopje at Potgeiter's and began to roll across the plain—the movement a facsimile of Colenso, in all its bravery, and, this time only, apparent folly. How steadily they tramp across the veldt, a dozen long stripes of yellow figures, each with 200 deaths on his atomic person—an example of latent power if ever there was one! On their left two batteries trotted forward under the very shadow of Spion Kop and the western heights of Brakfontein, halted, unlimbered, and prepared for action in the collected and ceremonious manner which years of 94-lb. shrapnel will never blow away from the British gunner. A spurt of crimson flame from one of their guns, and the artillery of the feint attack is in action.

So far the enemy has been silent as usual, though one column has now rolled up along the river opposite his left, and another brazenly flowed straight towards his centre and right, though fifty guns have been thundering at him for two hours, blowing his trenches into shreds, and if the occupants are mortal men their nerves with them. The Boers have introduced many strange things into modern warfare, queer boast for the only white nation on earth without an army, but nothing stranger and more difficult to deal with than this grim silence before a battle—

nay, according to military ideas, until the battle is half over. The accepted theory has always been that it were well to destroy or shake the *morale* of the enemy's advance by accurate shell-fire at long range, necessarily becoming more accurate as the distance shortened, until at the moment of assault the defenders might have to deal with men already shaken and glutted, with half their *vim* evaporated by losses and the fear of death. But with any other troops than British—for their *morale* is so steadfast and unshakable that for argumentative purposes they may be actually presumed to have none—one can imagine nothing more gloomy and terrible than this deathly silence of crowded trenches and frowning gun-pits. Even on the imperturbable British private it is not altogether without its effect, and one may notice a corresponding silence—a bad sign with our soldiers in action—and uneasy glances at the hill-tops and ridges from eyes which would flash and glare at every flash of the guns lurking along them, if the latter would but play the game and start their bellowing at the men who mean to take them. But there comes a moment when even Boer nerves yield, and some one raises his rifle and fires: how well the British army knows that solitary shot! It is supposed to be from

the Dutch general, a signal for all to commence firing; but I wager that it comes from some youthful Boer crouching and trembling in his trench, not with fear, but with that agony of something, perhaps of joy, which attacks most brave fighting men before the leash is removed and they are sent to their work. Were it a preconcerted signal, as the Boers pretend, it would be (the actions of Boer generals mostly are) much better timed, and would crack out when the assaulting columns were so closely committed that even a bloody retreat would be difficult, and a victorious rush impossible for lack of men to make it. At Colenso, another thousand yards and the army of Natal would have been no more; but the single rifle spoke, 10,000 trembling fingers pressed trigger before the echoes had died away, and the army of Natal was saved. Let there be no delusions about Colenso; it was not destruction but salvation: once in the river-bed, nothing human could have prevented the most awful massacre of modern times, compared to which Maiwand and Isandlwhana would have been but affairs of patrols, and the British nation might have become, instead of merely sorry, wellnigh insane.

It rang out, this single shot, when Wynne's

leading line had reached to within 1500 yards of the foot of Brakfontein, and on the instant was followed by the roar of thousands of rifles from end to end of the intrenched ridge. We could see the white spurts of dust dancing about the long yellow lines; but they kept steadily on, until even we, who were in the secret, began to wonder whether we were not to witness a real onslaught after all. At the same time a heavy gun on Spion Kop and several smaller ones on Brakfontein itself opened upon the batteries on Wynne's left. Their fire was rapid and accurate: it could hardly help being the latter, for gunners are but seldom blessed with so fair a mark as a line of guns at medium range drawn up on an open plain 1000 feet below. Right amongst the guns the shells dropped and burst, sometimes apparently exactly on one of the little frog-like shapes squatting nozzle heavenwards in its appointed place, hiding it altogether in a whirlwind of brown dust; but before it could blow away, before even the anxious "Ah!" had died on the lips of the spectators, out from the bosom of the cloud would leap the red tongue of flame which told that the smothered piece was countering the blow, and away up upon the crest of the ridge a defiant little ball of snowy smoke showed that from there, at any rate, it

was not safe to sit and gloat over British batteries in action. A fine sight, but finer was to come, when Wynne, having accomplished his object, gave the word to his lines to retire. Then the enemy, imagining that they were witnessing a second Colenso, rose as one man and poured shot and shell into the receding brigade. Calmly, without hurry, and with little loss, the gallant "feinters" withdrew themselves from the zone of fire, their retirement being covered by the continuous fire of the imperturbable batteries. The result was natural enough: every Boer gun was slewed round until it bore upon the guns beneath. For pure wild excitement the next quarter of an hour must have exceeded anything in the annals of warfare. It seemed impossible that those guns could get away: over them, between them, right upon them, burst a storm of projectiles, dashing up the earth in dun clouds, hiding guns, gunners, and horses; the guns were surely lost, and something like a groan burst from all the waiting and watching thousands away on the right. But it was quickly changed to a roar of applause, as out from that tornado, quietly and in order, every man and officer in his place, trotted those incredible gunners across, not away from, that belching ridge, pursued every step by huge

shells, not a bolt or bar missing, not a sign of hurry, no lashing or spurring of horses, but a composed and rhythmic trot, jingle, jingle, jingle, across the plain towards us, whilst overhead and on every side yelled and roared the projectiles from the angry Dutch guns. Magnificent, and war too, though 'twas hard to believe it, as the batteries in column of route filed past us, taking ground to the right, with the gunners sitting placidly on the limbers, and the drivers jog-jogging, as careful as ever about taut traces and the other minutiæ which have made the British artillery-driver the wonder of his world. I looked into the faces of these men as they passed: did they know what they had done, and, if they did, in the name of the Wonderful what was it in them that gave them power to do it? Civilian reader, if in the future you should see, as, alack! you probably will, a British gunner reeling flushed and unlovely from some reeking public-house, an object of offence to your cleanly mind, turn not up your nose Pharisee-wise, thanking Pandora that other things from her box fell to your share; but imagine to yourself that this man might be one of those who dragged the charge intrusted to him from out the whirlwind, amid hideous clamour and appalling danger, or remember, at

least, that he is of the same breed and cloth. You are a poor fish-like man if your heart does not warm to him, and his folly does not fade away and be utterly lost in the magnificence of which he is capable.

Thus reinforced, the artillery on the right, who had been steadily pounding away at Vaal Krantz and its neighbouring heights, redoubled the fire, to prepare the way for the real assault of the day. Now, too, Schwartz Kop disclosed its full broadside for the first time, and tremendous was the bombardment of the next hour. It is hopeless to attempt description of heavy artillery fire so as to be understood by those whom peaceful fate has not allowed to see or hear it. From the kop above us perhaps twenty enormous projectiles a minute were roaring their way towards the ridge 3000 yards ahead, each bearing 50 lb. of lyddite. As they smote their objective, Vaal Krantz reeled and shook, quivering through the haze of green and yellow smoke, bellowing back from its hollow caves at its tormentors as the shells burst with a reverberating roar even louder than that of the guns which had launched them. Just in front of us thirty or forty 15-pounders were swinging shrapnel with a continuous peal at the same unhappy hill, sweeping the crest-line from end to end with its ter-

rible avalanche of bullets. One could see the ground beneath the snowy puffs of smoke paling and smoking as the shower of lead whisked along it, tearing up the dark surface and disclosing the lighter soil beneath. Every now and then a big shell from the naval guns would fail to burst properly, and up into the air rushed a thick oily column of dark green smoke, as the charge, instead of detonating and shivering its steel prison into a hundred shouting fragments, merely opened its walls and died with a muffled thunderous groan in the charred hollow it had blasted for itself in the ground. Sometimes, when a movement of men was discernible on the ridge, a salvo was discharged, and the blow, as if from an Almighty hand, would alter the shape of the rocks before our very eyes. A terrible thing, a salvo, a thing of horror and wild terror to the frail bodies crouching before it; how grand is the mind that can keep them there! a mind as resistless in its way as the shrieking shell itself. A fine thing is courage: the Boers have their full share of it. They cling to the shattered rocks, lying flat upon the ground and feeling it quake as another messenger from the sailors crashes somewhere in their neighbourhood. Perhaps the bombardment slackens for a moment, and cautiously each man lifts his face from the

ground, and begins to peer over his boulder. But the air, like the ground, is alive and angry, there is a crack as of a colossal whip overhead, and a storm of lead rushes down from the sky into the pale upturned faces, dashing some of them red and shapeless down to the ground again. No need of cover to these: they have taken shelter behind a stronger thing than rock! But the others still crouch, stern minds combating and defeating trembling bodies; this ridge is theirs to hold, and by the help of the ancient God of the *voortrekkers*, their fathers, they will hold it: a fine thing is courage!

Meantime, under this terrific uproar, the Engineers are imperturbably pegging away at their bridge down at Munger's Drift, as fine a performance in its way as anything done during the battle. They were under a heavy rifle-fire, and suffered not a little, losing, I think, eleven men of the bridging party, and having every pontoon and plank struck by the Boer marksmen told off to harass them. If one were to sit down and think out an example of extreme discomfort and strain, requiring courage of the most real sort, I think that this job of carrying heavy weights slowly and carefully, tying elaborate knots, and adjusting unwilling timbers, all under a steady and well-aimed shower of bullets, would exceed

anything that one could imagine unassisted by experience. No rush and cheering here, only the pain of battle without its antidote—excitement; only a slow, methodical, and intensely responsible bit of skilled workmanship to get through, whilst the bullets whistle overhead, or thud dully into the wet planks, or more dully still into the bodies of comrades straining at the ropes and pontoon lashings. Many a man who would have dashed alone at Vaal Krantz itself would have found his fingers strangely useless and his strength fled had he set himself to work at this bridge under its shadow. Major Irvine and his sappers are experts in other things than engineering, in bravery as well as bridge-building, in modesty as well as mechanics: no branch of the army has done better or more hazardous work in the campaign than the R.E., or talked less about it.

At 2 P.M. the last plank is laid, and the gallant sappers, methodical to the last, clear up the *débris*, collect spare stores, and retire up the bank, while the batteries, big and little, thunder and shriek harder than ever; typhoons of splintering steel break over Vaal Krantz: if there is anything left alive upon it we shall know it soon —the time for the assault has come. One can hear no orders, the tremendous voices of the guns

seem to fill all space, but Lyttelton's brigade, the Light Brigade, lineal descendants of Crawfurd's in this latter-day war, rise as one man, shake themselves into order, and defile down the slope towards the bridge, which looks strangely lonely and dangerous now that the busy little crowd of workers which has clustered about it all the morning has departed. There is only one human figure near it, a pitiful little figure with uplifted arms, the dead body of a sapper lying beside his task at the far end of the planking. Marching down the hill through the scrubby trees, one's eye was held by this solitary corpse as if by some landmark one must not lose; we shall soon be alongside it: which of us shall cross the dark bridge that poor Sapper Jones has crossed within the next hour? Strange to say, the thought is not terrifying: it fits in with the deep clamour of the guns, the sight of the brown kopje ahead, and the smell of the steaming battery horses close by, as part of a single experience. A battle is a kaleidoscope to the brain and senses, as it is an earthquake to the instincts. A dead man is but a tile in the weird mosaic, the thought of death but another; it is not till afterwards that one is horrified at one's absence of horror, or sad to remember that some one jested in the presence of unutterable sadness.

Well, well, were it not so men would not fight at all, and there is no good metal save that of which the fibres have been welded and knit upon the anvil. The Durhams lead the way, followed by the 1st Rifle Brigade, the Scottish Rifles, and the 60th, the Devons, lent from the 2nd Brigade, with a mission of their own bringing up the rear. There is a pause, and then a glorious dash for the bridge: the Light Brigade had never more need of swift feet; the bridge has long been marked by every gun and rifle on the Boer position. A storm of bullets from front and right whit viciously upon the woodwork, or splash up the thick water on either side like a thunder-shower. The pom-pom opens at once, its weird knocking coming from behind a low green hill to the right of Vaal Krantz. Its stream of shells arrive; like a whirlwind they leap into the throng of doubling men on the rocking pontoon. The casualties are few but terrible; the face is swept from the head of one eager soldier, who lives and stands a moment unconscious of his frightful fate. Another is disembowelled, and he too, wretched lot, lives, pleading horribly to comrades hurrying by with averted heads to spare a moment from the killing ahead to kill him. It is well that all men should know what war is. Ye Olliviers

with your "light hearts," your cause must be just indeed if things like these do not weigh upon you. But the Light Brigade sweeps on, 1000 men have crossed before the Boer gunners have time to reload, though the rifle-bullets pour from the hill-tops in a constant wailing stream, not all into the water. A party of riflemen from a low hill on the extreme right cause the greatest annoyance: the bridge is in full view of them, and their fire rains upon it with scarcely a bullet astray. Four Maxim guns are hastily turned upon them; but a million bullets lash round their hiding-place without effect, and to the end of the day the bridge was under a steady and accurate fire from these plucky Dutchmen.

And now the Light Brigade is over, and the Devons, heavies of heavies, as imperturbable as their own Tors of Dartmoor, tramp after, company by company, over the lurching pontoon, and gain the comparative shelter of the farther bank. They have, as I said, a mission of their own, and a hazardous one it looks. Away to the eastward of Vaal Krantz, under the very shoulder of Doornkloof, lies the small round hill or hillock from behind which the Boers have been firing their pom-pom. Laterally it is quite isolated; 2000 good yards intervene between it and Vaal Krantz. Immediately over it looms

Doornkloof, upon which squats a 96-pounder Creusot gun. To its right rise other heights, all certainly held, otherwise the Creusot and the pom-pom would not be where they are. On its left it would be exposed to flanking fire from Brakfontein, and from Vaal Krantz itself if our troops failed to seize it. But that "if" even now has not found its way into the dictionary of the army. British troops have never failed to seize, and have only failed to hold when the rest of the army has been suffered—nay, commanded—to sit still and watch whilst the whole Boer army summoned Death to loosen their strong grip. So Spion Kop has introduced no "if" into the dictionary, only a "why?" and it is not answered yet. To take and hold this green hill was the mission of the Devons, and they were just setting about it when a breathless horseman, galloping down from the trees across the river, arrived to cancel the order. The horseman was General Hildyard, and right glad he doubtless was to be able to turn a regiment of his own little family from a task from which they would assuredly have returned no regiment at all. So the Devons were now to conform to the movements of the Light Brigade, and go for Vaal Krantz. Lyttelton's men were now at it in fine style, Durhams and Rifles front line, the other

two battalions supporting, away through the waist-high mealies and over the sticky plough they were streaming, their left on the river-bank, their right "in the air," shot and shell doing its work amongst them, here and there a stiff form just visible amongst the thick mealie-stalks, or an agitated waving of their feathery tops as a wounded man rolled and writhed unseen on the ground. There is a steady rattle of rifles from the ridge of Vaal Krantz, and from the green hill and the dongas to the east. Munger's Farm, a small building out on the plain, blazes pluckily for a few moments: it is rushed at the bayonet's point, and the brigade rolls on, incredibly fast, wondrously straight, for the frowning Krantz. The hurrying lines reach its foot, dive into the spruit-bed which runs like a moat around it, and stream cheering up its rocky side, amid a wild pounding from the angry Boer gunners on either flank, who pour shrapnel and monstrous common shell at random over the crowded hillside. There is a brief and breathless "worry" at the top, and the hill is ours. Few Boers have remained to face the bayonets, —only five pale, wild-eyed creatures arose and lifted their hands above their heads as the leaping soldiers drew near. They have stood for hours the awful battering from our guns, but their

friends have fled, and small blame to them, from the savage eyes and lowered points sweeping up the hill towards them; so they "hands up," and are conducted towards the rear, with every right to proudly say, "We are the garrison of Vaal Krantz, surrendered with all the honours."

To one who took part in it, that advance will ever be memorable. The line taken by that part of the force to which the writer belongs lay along the spruit-bed itself for the most part—that is to say, after leaving the bridge—almost straight for Vaal Krantz. A narrow path just above the water-line, overhung with bushes in parts, formed the "going," and there was little time for observation or reflection in the single file of racing, stumbling figures that poured along it. At every turn which exposed the track to the view of the defenders of the hill in front, a whirl of rifle-bullets beat upon the wet ground and whisked the twigs in the air with a noise like that of hundreds of small whips; at every turn visible to the riflemen along Doornkloof the whirlwind came again, from behind this time. Every now and then the hot breathless *queue* was "brought up" with a bump and a volley of oaths—some one was down in front: never mind, press on, plenty more behind! At one spot a wounded man lay right across the

track, and the long line of men leapt over his body like a flock of sheep over a puddle. He was horribly wounded, and as one jumped no power on earth could keep one's eyes from falling towards his naked hurt. At intervals one came to a little siding or recess, and in this would be huddled as many wounded as it would hold, all silent, half-undressed, filthy, unnerving, the very slums of war. A gun from our right had marked this spruit-bed for its own, and every moment the shells came lobbing over the bank, throwing up a powdery geyser as they dived into the water, or plunging with a sullen smack into the opposite bank. Never once, luckily, did they attain their object and skim, with a steep descent, the ridge of the bank under which we advanced, or the slaughter would have been terrible. Once, for five minutes, we halted altogether, no one thought of asking why: there was breath to regain, boot-laces to do up, equipment to settle in its place and ease. The whole line sat down as one man. Just below, on a little sandy spit on the river's verge, lay a dead man of the Durhams, his head half in and half out of the water, which lapped idly against his pale face and matted hair. It seemed incredible that he should not get up and shake the water from him: one expected to see him do it every moment.

Then a shell came whistling over, and plunged like a heavy fish into the water a few yards beyond him, a circle of waves springing outwards as it smote the water. They rolled towards the motionless figure, and broke one after the other with a little plash over his head. Then one remembered he was dead, and was glad when with many grunts, at a sharp word of command or two, the silent crouching line of living men heaved themselves up, and the clambering, running, sweating forward rush began again. In parts the path failed, broken down by recent rains, and here it was necessary to claw one's way to the top, and race across the open plough until the original course could be resumed. Shouldering one's body over that clayey bank was like putting one's head into a fire: the long grass was alive with bullets, which hissed and rustled through it like a thousand snakes. But not a man hesitated,—over they sprawled or fell, assisted perhaps by a shove from a comrade below, which might have been called a blow at a less exciting time. Then helter-skelter across the furrows, through the spits of dust snapping up in hundreds on every side, no disorder despite the pace, every racing man with his eye on his officer racing ahead of him, transferring his allegiance automatically in

a manner that would have made the drill-book blush a deeper red with pleasure, if the figure, with its field-glasses and shoulder stars, fell and gave place to another. And many fell; amongst whom a gallant officer of the Rifle Brigade has supplied the only gleam of fun recorded in connection with this joyless battle. Hit in the leg, the officer in question rolled over, and no doubt, as wounded men will, gave vent to the sort of sentiments which made Kipling's Highland sergeant so greatly dread a battle, "It does make the men sweer awfu'!" Whereupon the colour-sergeant of his company rushed to his assistance, and commenced feeling for the wound in the neighbourhood of the stomach. On being somewhat sharply put right about this by the sufferer, the non-commissioned officer made the following deathless reply:[1] "Beg parding, sir; from yer langwidge I concluded you was 'it in the habdomen"!

Then down one dived into the spruit-bed once more, pressing on to the steep foot of the Krantz,

[1] I say deathless, partly because, amongst a myriad of other good things of the war, this story has already appeared in the pages of that rosy organ, the 'Sporting Times.' In extenuation of its reappearance here the writer must ask the genial "Pink 'Un" to remember that such stories, being true, are history and the property of the public, and that there is no doubt a section of it which does not read the "Pink 'Un" who may yet be reached through the pages of this book.

and then, whilst a portion of the force was halted below, away up amongst the boulders and bursting shells swarmed the rest, in the wake of the stormers, amid a babel of reports, cheers, commands, and the crack and hum of innumerable bullets. A moment of real life, indeed, to those who were suffered to live—a hot, mad, and riotous interlude that will whirl and sing hereafter above the monotony of ordinary living to every soul present, however eventful his subsequent lot. No more schoolboy scorn for gentle Oliver's excited old gaffer of Auburn: shall we not some day shoulder our crutch, and tell the youngsters how Vaal Krantz was won by the Light Brigade? Perhaps they too will laugh at us, as we laughed at the old villager, but we shall not see or hear it. We shall only see above us the steep brown forehead of the crag, with the pitted smoking shell-holes, and a racing mob of victorious British soldiers swarming upwards, until the clear-cut edge of the hill's crest grew confused and wobbly with the numbers crowding over it. And we shall see—perhaps, if we are very old, our eyes will be foolish enough to grow dimmer and more moist than usual—unhappy twisted forms sprawling behind the rocks or propped up against them, the red flush of exertion and fury slowly changing to something

even more terrible to look at. Ye comrades with whom, ye enemies against whom, we fought that day, it was no transitory ephemeral thing ye did, though doubtless history, cold statue of events that have burned with life, will snub your bravery and agonies with the glib phrase, "indecisive action." But then, and at other times, ye drove into one heart at least of 20,000 some dim knowledge of the intensity and pathos of human life, of which a hundred years of successful pottering in barracks, or office, or mansion, would never have unfolded a shred. The world is full of vast, flame-like emotions, of which one reads and thinks, and imagines that one feels a faint glow. Only rarely can one *see* them: in mighty gatherings such as that which thronged around the track of the gun-carriage, when the Mistress of half the earth and sea made her last progress through her capital, in great accidents, in great crimes, but most of all in battles, when the fires buried in the earth of all men's souls are cast up by the seismic task they are at, and one sees some of the glory, fury, and possibilities of human nature projected in one compass as plainly before the eyes as the picture on the sheet before a magic-lantern.

Vaal Krantz was discovered to be smaller than

expected, so, after the hasty distribution of troops along its crest, a portion of the attacking force was ordered to leave the hill and take cover in the dry spruit-bed at its foot. Night was coming on, but still the shells came tearing through the gloom from Spion Kop, Brakfontein, and Doornkloof, and Zwartzkop still bellowed from behind in answer. As the darkness grew our guns ceased their long day's work, as also did the heavier ordnance on the Boer position; but their smaller guns and pom-poms kept it up far into the night, slating the reverse slopes of the Krantz with wonderful accuracy. It is a curious experience being shelled at night, to hear the projectiles stealing through the still night air from afar, their rustle changing to a whistle, the whistle to a shriek, the shriek to a reverberating crash as the shell smashes into a boulder and bursts with a crimson and yellow glare in the blackness, lighting up for an instant the prostrate forms and pale faces of the men lying motionless in their places. The pom-pom was particularly active and accurate, spotting the whole length of the hillside at times with a trail of blinding spots of white fire. So constant was the fire that the general, fearing a counter-attack, ordered up two companies from the spruit-bed to prolong his right. But no counter-attack came:

as the warm still night drew on even the shelling ceased, and towards midnight silence reigned over all.

But there was work to be done. No sooner was it ascertained that the Boer gunners had retired for the night than every weary soldier was on his legs again, piling stone on stone, scraping the adamantine ground with bayonet-points and the blades of knives, preparing cover for the inevitable bombardment of the morrow. It is miserable work for officers, this hustling and badgering of men who can hardly stand from fatigue, but it must be done, for the British soldier takes no thought for the morrow, and will anticipate with nonchalance the most tremendous hammering if he be only allowed to sleep *now*. He is, as I have before written, more of a man than a soldier, and there are times when he has to be bullied out of his manly weaknesses and reminded that he is at present engaged in soldier's work. To do him justice, he is grateful afterwards; but he would do the same again, and the officer who would merely order a thing to be done at such times, without actually seeing that it is done, does not deserve to be an officer at all.

At dawn on Tuesday, February 6, the shelling recommenced, and continued without inter-

mission all day. Flat in their sangars lay the gallant men of Lyttelton's brigade, lashed by shrapnel, pounded and torn by common shell, swept by pom-pom shells, tormented by an interminable stream of Mauser bullets from left, front, and right. Down in the spruit-bed lay the Devons, and watched the stretchers coming slantwise down the hill, the bearers stumbling, sometimes checking, foot in air, when a shell burst near them or a bullet hissed close by their heads. Then down they would come along the spruit-bed, the stretcher sagging in the middle and black with blood, its occupant silent and immobile. Very many wounded came down thus, and some dead, pale, and filthy, arms sticking stiffly outwards, bodies so distorted and rigid that it was impossible to keep a covering over them. So they passed while all men pretended not to see them. It was hailed as a jolly occurrence when one stretcher, containing a wounded officer, came by with its occupant serenely smoking a pipe. One could ask questions of a man like this: "Don't do as I did, and take cover behind a tuft of grass, because it don't stop bullets!" We faithfully promise the brave cheerful gentleman that we will do no such thing. "Hot up there?" "Devilish hot; well, I must be shoving on, so long!" and the

perspiring stretcher-bearers bend to their load again, and the officer is borne away, still smoking, though his leg is smashed to flinders and his last taste of food was forty hours ago. An officer of the Rifle Brigade, shot through the shoulder, the bullet drilling a clean round hole through the bone, sticks to his work all day up on the hill, moralising on the humane nature of "punctured wounds"! What room is there for cynics in a world of men like this? Down in a deep pool floundered a poor wounded mule. Even in that atmosphere of pain it made one's eyes fill to see the brute lift his head from the water and gaze around with his wonderful limpid eyes for help, looking from soldier to soldier, hopeful when one drew near, pitiful as a woman's when the man passed on unseeing. Seeing that the animal was past saving, I ordered a soldier to shoot it. Unnerved by the unaccustomed job, the man fired twice and missed, the mule gazing straight into his eyes with a look impossible to describe. The third shot took effect, and this unimportant little addition to the casualty list sank down dead into his pool. Poor little brute! was it for this they brought you all the way from Peshawar? but you have died as few of your brothers have died, sorrowed for the moment by one of your lords and masters at any rate.

But this is no time or place for sentimentalising *à la* Sterne. There is a scuffle and a bustle upon the left crest of the hill, and a redoubled energy noticeable in the Dutch guns. Men are rising and rushing forward, others are recoiling; by the gods, the Boers are trying to retake the hill! The Mausers fairly roar, crash after crash of volleys answer them from the whole length of the crest-line, which is misty, blue, and brown with the haze from the rifle-barrels, and the earth blown up by the bursting shells. The reserve battalion rises and sweeps forward and upward, bearing with it the front line which had recoiled, fairly shot off the crest. The Mauser fire dwindles and dies, the English volleys change into a pealing rat-tat-tat of independent fire; the counter-attack has failed, for which thank the Lord and the reserve battalion. Once more before dusk the enemy attempts it: it is beaten off as before, with less trouble; attack is not the *métier* of the Boer, though for an amateur he does not do it badly. But he has a way of firing too much and advancing too little, which—if the defenders stand—renders it impossible for him to get up that *élan* and enthusiasm inseparable from a successful onslaught, and only possible to men like our own, who can subordinate all thoughts to that of "getting there."

Just as darkness fell again the order came for the 2nd Brigade to relieve the 4th upon the Krantz. The Boer fire had slackened a bit, though an occasional shell and an intermittent flight of bullets still groaned and whistled along the hillside. Silently the battalions moved forward across the spruit-bed and breasted the hill. It was becoming very dark, and the battered battalions of the 4th Brigade stumbled thankfully down the hill after enduring a bombardment of thirty-six long hours, in which they had borne themselves nobly in sight of the whole army.

The 2nd Brigade disposed themselves as follows: Queen's along the left crest of the hill, which curled back until it faced Brakfontein, now a burnt, black, hideous fortress, very different to the graceful green down which had smiled over the river two days before. On the right of the Queen's the East Surrey, on their right again the West Yorkshire. Formed up on the reverse slope of the hill, the Devons took position as reserve, ready to speed to any threatened spot. This battalion had, as previously related, lain in the spruit-bed all the previous night and day, and had sent some of their companies up the hill with the stormers, and others to prolong the right of the defence on the first night of our

occupancy, so they considered themselves the veterans of the hill. A fine brigade the 2nd, all solid good battalions, who had proved their metal. It was soon to be tried, as highly as human stuff can be tried. As before, the night was spent in "sangaring" the position—infinite toil in such rocky ground, where every stone has to be levered from its bed and carried to its appointed place. Until 2 A.M. the men worked like navvies, grumbling, as is the soldier's wont, but doing a vast deal in the time. Full well they knew what the day would bring: they had not lain beneath that kopje a day and a night for nothing. And at the first glint of dawn the first shell came. The enemy had not been idle in the night either: there were more guns in position than there had been the day before. The 3-inch spitfire on the lower slopes of Spion Kop had called a big 40-lb. brother to his aid. This powerful weapon, perched upon the summit of the mountain, cunningly concealed behind a little knoll, fired almost straight into the backs of the occupants of Vaal Krantz, most of all into the closely formed Devons, whose prone ranks of quarter column must have appeared as a yellow parallelogram—a beautiful mark, and one seldom missed. From the right the big gun on Doornkloof hurled its huge projectiles on to the little

kopje so far below it, sometimes shrapnel of vast size, which swept the reverse slope from summit to base; sometimes common shell, which came bellowing on to or over the rocky crest, swinging its shattered fragments with a whirr and a groan down the hillside, all heads lowering before its irresistible rush. Pom-poms on right and left, two high velocity French guns in front, and a battery of what appeared to be 7-pounders on Brakfontein close on the left, completed the Boer artillery. A useful list at any time, but an almost overpowering one when directed at one small distinct target such as the Krantz and the brigade upon it. Our own magnificent ordnance might have been absent for all the good they did in stopping the Boer fire. Every Dutch gun was so perfectly concealed, and if "spotted," so quickly and skilfully removed, that never once did our shells succeed in touching them. The monster on Doornkloof had a close shave. Its epaulement, and even its muzzle, were plainly visible to our gunners, and tons of shell and lyddite plunged around it all day. Suddenly, apparently from inside the very work itself, came a heavy report, and up into the air rushed a vast column of smoke. A shell from the naval guns on Schwartzkop had landed in the epaulement and blown up the reserve of ammunition lying

in readiness behind the weapon. Surely that long Frenchman had said his last word, and a cheer arose from those who had witnessed the incident. But no; after a meditative silence of half an hour up came the blunt black snout again, poked inquiringly about like that of some great serpent raising his head from the jungle for a look round, and then, boom! a 94-lb. shell was cleaving its ponderous way towards the 5-inch guns drawn up on the flat by the river. There was a crash and an earthy eruption between the 5-inchers: the Frenchman had got the range to a yard, and intermittently, for the rest of the day, made marvellous, but happily almost innocuous, shooting at our heavy batteries, varying his practice by a shot into the cavalry sheltering amongst the woods below Schwartzkop, or an artistic series of bull's-eyes at his old objective, Vaal Krantz and us. About 2 P.M. the six small guns upon Brakfontein opened a tremendously hot fire, shell after shell, with but ten seconds or so interval, dropped amongst the sangars, the reports coming with the regularity of a blacksmith's blows upon his anvil. Some one counted 253 of these and other projectiles which fell upon the Krantz in three-quarters of an hour, and then gave it up. Down below, in the bend of the river immediately

under the kopje, the Engineers were building a second pontoon-bridge. They must have been invisible to almost every portion of the enemy's position, but their presence was signalled by some accurate and keen-eyed observer, and shells, thrown at random but wonderfully well placed, began to fall around the workers. The bridge was hit twice ere completed, one shell plunging straight through the centre of the planking, boring for itself a clean round hole. But the gallant R.E. worked on unconcernedly, and the Boer gunners, doubtless informed that the task had been successfully accomplished, desisted at length from their efforts in this direction, and again turned their attention to the battered Krantz.

It was a terrible day for the 2nd Brigade—a day of dull silent waiting in the blazing heat, listening to the interminable whistle and roar of the shells falling amongst them, lying flat in the stony sangars wondering where the next would burst, and who would be the next to be lifted, bloody and maimed, by the stretcher-bearers for that journey down the steep hillside. The Queen's, whom no artillery in the world would move, suffered heavily up on the left crest, keeping their discipline, than which there is none finer in the British army, intact under

an absolutely ceaseless visitation of projectiles. The East Surrey and West Yorkshire suffered too, but less heavily; and below on the hillside the Devons bore it stolidly and patiently—a motionless herd of silent enduring men. Many hundreds of shells fell and burst in their midst, doing, however, marvellously little damage either to bodies or nerves—the former pure luck, the latter pure worth and courage. Every incident taking place on the plain below is visible to us on the Krantz. A big shell, bursting close to a man carrying water, shoots him with its tremendous breath bodily ten feet along the ground; and he lies there dead, but actually untouched. A stream of pom-pom shells tears through a group of tethered horses. They struggle madly, burst their bonds, and gallop in all directions for a few moments. But one of them lies disembowelled, legs stiffly hoisted in the air, still tethered to his peg; and the others return one by one and gaze curiously at their dead comrade from a respectful distance, ears cocked forward, fascinated by the unusual sight, and, so standing, are re-caught by the grooms, who make them fast and dash back to their shelter again. Away out over the plain, over the ground traversed yesterday by Wynne's brigade, two mounted men are cauti-

ously advancing, for reasons unknown, towards a small ruined house standing alone in the vast expanse of grass. They get nearer and nearer, the horses appearing almost on tiptoe with apprehension, and a little dog, which had been gambolling ahead of them, slinking in "to heel," evidently at command. Suddenly from nowhere in particular bursts a crackle of musketry, and about the feet of the horses hundreds of little spurts of dust dance and leap. The troopers swing round as on a pivot and gallop back, the little dog labouring behind them: their purpose, whatever it is, is defeated, or perhaps gained. The plain, which looks so flat and even, is really a series of undulations; and every hollow holds Boers, invisible as lizards, and only discoverable by such means as the above. One is glad to see the two troopers and the little black dot of a dog disappear safely in the direction of Potgeiter's. Half-way down the Krantz the shadow of a single tree has been utilised by the officers of one of the regiments as a mess. Yesterday, though they do not know it, a shell landed plump into the middle of a group of officers hastily lunching, killing the mess-mule and setting fire to the helmet on the head of one of the feasters. A wonderful sight, and still more wonderful the arctic cool-

ness of the officer, who, blazing like a cresset, doffed his helmet, and with a jest extinguished the flames. To-day the mess-servants have prepared hot soup; and down from all parts of the shell-stricken hill figures may be seen crawling towards the spot, running over exposed patches of ground, disappearing under cover when a bevy of shells announce their approach and burst uproariously all around. Mere rifle-bullets were nothing accounted on this day, though all the time there was a steady ping-ping from the marksmen on Brakfontein, who from their position on the left can sweep Vaal Krantz from flank to flank. At length perhaps a dozen officers are under the tree, receiving their basins of soup, some sitting, others standing. Crash! a 94-lb. shrapnel-shell bursts over the hill, an avalanche of bullets pours over the tree, tearing off twigs and leaves with a sound like the wind through the rigging of a ship. The officers, spoon half-way to mouth, crouch under the deadly shower; one is slightly hit in the back, and all, when the storm is past, scatter and scramble up to their shelters again, carrying the basins of soup precariously in their hands, a broad grin on every face at the absurdity of the situation. Another crash, and

another shrapnel. Some of the tin basins fall and clatter down amongst the stones, amid a roar of laughter. Gallant men, even absurdity is not absurd under such conditions: may you lunch all the rest of your days in peace and honour, for though you desire only the latter you deserve both. A private soldier supplies the next bit of fun. Sent down from the crest in search of water, he passes on his downward way the serried ranks of the reserve battalion lying prone and motionless, many of them asleep, in their shelters. Thinking that he has stumbled on a battalion of corpses, he flies back appalled to his commanding officer. "Sir," he cries, "it's hawful down there; the dead are lyin' in 'eaps, and the wounded, I don't know *'ow* many there isn't!" Honest fellow, he is reassured after inquiry (the report was, nevertheless, worth inquiry), and sets out again on his hazardous journey.

And so on throughout the day, a dismal, dangerous eternity of sun, dust, shells, and bullets: a longer bombardment is probably unknown in the history of battles, a more sturdy and immovable endurance of it certainly unknown. Once during the day Generals Buller and Warren approach the hill to see for themselves if it be not possible to get guns upon

its razor-back, and so to answer on equal terms the Dutch guns on the ridges beyond. The conclusion was apparently an unfavourable one, for the generals ride back, and it is soon known that the hill is to be vacated when darkness sets in. So we are to retire for the third time: alack! three hundred years of war have not seen the British army turn its back so often as this last six months. But there is no despondency, only a widely expressed concurrence in the wisdom of the order, and an increased trust in the general for his strength of mind in publicly going back upon his public word. The rest of the day, until 6 P.M., the intermittent storm of shells still played upon the kopje, now increasing in intensity, now slackening to a mere one per quarter of an hour; never ceasing altogether, never missing their mark altogether, never shaking in the smallest degree the stubborn immobility of the battalions lying exhausted in the sangars. Evening drew on, and as it merged into night the firing gradually died away, until all but one insatiable gun were silent, the report of this one tolling out like the minute-gun at sea; our own guns ceased their roaring as if to listen to it, and at length, as if ashamed of breaking the deathly

silence, it, too, fired no more. There was a long pause, during which the stillness was almost painful after the thunderings of the day. Then men arose in the twilight from the shelters in which hundreds of them had lain all day without moving hand or foot, and set themselves to prepare for the retirement. There was little talking, all were so utterly weary, only a smothered word of command or two from the sergeants, and a low murmur from the groups of officers discussing the arrangements for evacuating the hill. Our route was to lie over the pontoon at the foot of the Krantz. At 9 P.M. the first units were to move, the bridge being held on the far bank by the Devons, who would then cover its demolition and removal by the R.E.

The hour appointed came at last; like phantoms the brigade arose and stole down towards the bridge-head. The Devons lay, a long dark line of men along the bank, and watched the stream of retreating men hurrying across, silent and bent with fatigue, disappearing as they reached the farther side back into the gloom towards Potgeiter's. Suddenly, in the midst of the movement, there was a blinding glare of musketry from the summit of the Krantz. The Boers, creeping up in the darkness for an

attack, had heard the rustle and murmur of the retirement, and thinking, as at Spion Kop, that they in turn were being attacked, discharged their rifles with one accord and fled, their flight hastened by hurried volleys from the skeleton line of men left by the rear regiment to hold the crest until the main body was safely away. Then all was silent, and the sections of fours began to flow over the bridge again. At length all were over, and the heavy waggons of the pontoon-train rolled up from somewhere in the background, the sappers went down to the bridge, and the work of demolition began.

It was now midnight, and intensely dark; behind, the army was in full retreat: very lonely felt the four companies lying chilled and watchful along the damp misty river-bank, and many were the objurgations uttered against the slowness of the Engineers. But the Engineers were not slow; to and fro with perfect method and order moved the stream of workers, some towards the waggons, staggering beneath the ponderous boats, which loomed up from the dark river-bed like some gigantic ichthyosaurus, others pacing smartly along with the "chesses," or roadway planks, others clinging toad-like to the structure itself, struggling

with knots and lashings, whilst all the time a constant stream of "empties" flowed the reverse way down to the bridge again to seize upon some other portion of the diminishing pontoon, and then to fall in *queue* again with their load up to the waggons. But though the Engineers worked their best and hardest, and very good and very hard must be the work that Major Irvine labels "best," it seemed an age to us, lying on tenter-hooks alongside, with the whole Boer army in front and our comrades leaving us farther and farther every moment behind. But it is a long bridge that has no ending, and about 1 A.M. the last plank came up, the heavy waggons were set in motion, and, with their infantry escort, began the journey towards the rear.

And so we will leave them, disappearing back into the darkness, bearing with them the last link that joined Boer and Briton in combat on the never-to-be-forgotten field of Vaal Krantz. British soldiers will cross that riddled pontoon but once more, on their way to what the world, at any rate, counts a higher virtue than Faith, or Hope, or Charity—Success.

VI.

THE BATTLE OF PIETER'S HILL.

SPRINGFIELD CAMP again until February 10, only one idle day, on which the army mopped its brow and took deep breaths. Thence on the 10th to Pretorius Farm, and before dawn on the 11th across to Chieveley once more, pursued during the hours of darkness by a Boer search-light from Grobler's Kloof, which roved like an angry eye from end to end of our line of march. At Chieveley two peaceful days in a lovely mimosa-forest on the southern bank of the Blaukrantz stream, with most of the army revelling in the cold pools all day under the semi-tropical sun. A beautiful corner of Natal this, the scenery a mixture of Norway, Scotland, and the New Forest — wooded hills, stony, rushing streams, and tangled bottoms.

In the following article I have briefly referred to the operations preceding the battle of Pieter's

Hill. As no writer has as yet done anything more, a rapid description may not be out of place here, forming as they did the *clef* of the whole successful rush which relieved Ladysmith. The seizure of Hussar Hill on the 14th (it had been occupied already and abandoned on the 12th) was child's play, a short and sharp bombardment, a dash by the cavalry, who just missed capturing the picket upon it, and the whole column was streaming across its steep wooded sides, bivouacking luxuriously there the day and night of the 15th. On the 16th, whilst heavy guns were being brought up, under an accurate shell-fire from Hlangwani and the heights to the north, the infantry were sent plunging through the intersected country to the east of the hill, reconnoitring towards Cingolo, a long flat mountain joined by a deep nek to another, Monte Cristo, of exactly similar shape to the northward. Below the forward foot of the latter, which is one dense mass of tropical shrubs and cactus, flows the Tugela in a profound and splendid ravine, and beyond a level plain stretching to Bulwana. To the left can be seen the reverse side of the Colenso position, with Hlangwani, an amorphous mass of rocks, trees, and fortifications slightly to the left rear, and between, Green Hill, a grassy flat

strongly intrenched. To the right a succession of kopjes and valleys towards Weenen. Monte Cristo once in our hands, Colenso was untenable; one could bombard its backyard, so to speak, and so one strong wall between us and the starving division in Ladysmith would be flung down.

I have elsewhere condemned the Boer strategy; it was never more futile than at this period. It may be that our previous stupidity was here our salvation. Botha could not believe that so astute a movement could be our real attack, and looked for it as before from some obvious and foolish direction. The reconnaissance mentioned above might have given him an inkling: it found the twin mountains weakly held, there was a slight interchange of fire, and the troops returned to their bivouac without loss, and not daring to believe that their task was going to be as easy as it looked.

Next day all guesses were but history: Cingolo was assaulted and taken. Lyttelton's Division (Hildyard's and Norcott's brigades) with Wynne's Brigade added, formed the attack, and of these by far the greater part of the work fell to Hildyard's men, the English brigade of Queen's, Devons, West Yorkshire, and East Surrey. The three latter regiments,

hurrying through the dense undergrowth, stumbling into invisible holes, their faces whipped by twigs and tall rough grasses, poured over the hidden bed of the Gomba stream, clambered swiftly up the steep face of the mountain, and at the top met the Queen's, who had made a wide and incredibly rapid sweep around the right. Resistance was short, but whilst it lasted sharp; a nasty fire whistled almost perpendicularly down through the tree-tops, many of the bullets being from heavy elephant-rifles, which smote the tree-trunks with a smack which made the leaves and branches rattle. But the volleys of the Queen's from the right edge of the summit soon cleared the outnumbered Middleburgers from their eyrie, with the loss of their commandant, and as evening fell Cingolo Mountain was in our possession, the troops bivouacking astride of it and all down its western side. In the meantime the other brigades had made good progress through the difficult lower ground on the left, bringing up for the night in a secure and invisible position from which to assist in the onslaught on Monte Cristo next day. A good and dashing day's work all round, with small losses (under 100 of the troops engaged), and high hopes for the morrow, when

Monte Cristo must fall or the whole movement miscarry.

At 2 A.M. a field-battery suddenly appeared like phantoms amongst the sleeping Devons and West Yorkshire: "What do you want?" "Can you get us up the mountain?" "Don't know, but we will try," and up sprang the weary men and buckled to the drag-ropes, chaffing the drivers, for once in a way useless to their charges. The mountain-side was almost perpendicular, with here and there a small shelf of flattish ground; trees, cactus, boulders, water-runs everywhere; no easy task to climb at all, much less drag two tons of gun-metal over it in the dark. But before daylight every gun perched hidden on its shelf, scattered irregularly up the precipice, somewhat to the scandalisation of the precise gunners, to whom alignment and interval are a fetich to be worshipped, no matter how fierce the fire or uneven the terrain. Up and down the narrow goat-tracks crawled a continuous *queue* of men, each reverently bearing a 15-pounder shell, deeply ignorant and careful of its unknown horrors, until every piece had around it its complement of the unholy-looking red-topped cones. A fine bit of work, and the men who stole two hours of herculean toil from the dark hours, after and before a long exhausting

day's fighting, did not regret it next day when they saw these very guns practically win the battle, and with the battle the road to Ladysmith. At daylight the attack recommenced. The last teams hauling at the drag-ropes had but time to scamper down the hill, find arms and accoutrements, fall hurriedly into the ranks, and away through the stiff cactus and rank shoulder-high vegetation towards Monte Cristo. It was a quick thing, as hunting men say. Forward and upward swept Hildyard's Brigade, plunging from the thickets out into the clearings in rapidly moving waves of men: when the ranks were hidden in the wood, the hillside seemed deserted; when they burst into the narrow grassy rides, it seemed as if the whole steep forest had suddenly burst into life, vanishing as quickly as it had come, until another press of men repeated the miracle. At the edge of the nek the West Yorkshire encountered some snipers in a kraal; the fire was hot, but the North-Countrymen poured unchecked over the spot in a resistless stream, and with the Queen's and Devons were soon racing down the nek's steep side with Monte Cristo looking them bluffly in the face. The fire became intense; a cloud of riflemen fringed the opposite crest;

shrapnel and a Maxim swept the slope, and the deep cup of the nek seemed likely to become the hottest of hot holes. But the tremendous pace of the attack fairly frightened the enemy, already somewhat shaken by the deadly fire from the hidden battery on Cingolo. Their fire was erratic even at first, and as wave after wave swept down, rushed across the flat, and began to lap up the farther side, it became wild and wilder. Then it ceased altogether for a second—the psychological second that calls "Stay!" or "Run!" to wavering men, broke out into one resonant harmless crash, and was silent; the Boers were flying, and the English brigade was in their sangars before they were "cold." Something wrong with this commando, evidently; these were not the men of Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz. As we came over the southern crest of the nek I had seen them running agitatedly to and fro, every now and then dropping on one knee for a hasty shot, then leaping up and dashing off again, unusual Boer tactics on the defensive. Had they lain glum and cool-headed along the crags as usual, Cingolo Nek had been a tough and terrible nut to crack. As it was, the casualties over the whole force were again trifling, under 100 killed and wounded. Exactly 17

British lives had with skill sufficed to turn the lines of Colenso, a task that without it had already cost over 500.[1]

A finer piece of generalship than this flanking rush has not often been seen; it came like a flood of light into a darkened room, and, as inspiration with good tools always will, forged a masterpiece. The subsequent apparently unenlightened butting against the wall of Pieter's seemed to the uninformed a curious reversion. But it was, no doubt, founded on the plainest information of Boer demoralisation, and in those days we had not seen Boers demoralised often

[1] The precise figures are as follows :—

	Killed.	Wounded.
Colenso	158	762
Spion Kop	323	1103
Vaal Krantz . . .	33	344
Monte Cristo . . .	17	260
	531	2469

The battle of Pieter's Hill added 342 killed and 1621 wounded, bringing the cost of the relief (in pitched battles only) to 873 killed and 4090 wounded. Of these, 70 officers were killed, 213 wounded. This does not include losses at Willow Grange, 13 killed, 67 wounded. Up to and including Almond's Nek, after which battle the Natal army may be considered to have completed its work, the total losses in battle had been 948 killed, 4340 wounded. Of the stray casualties, scouts, attacks on pickets, &c., I do not know the number. Of the prisoners, though we lost none to be ashamed of, I do not want to know the number.

enough to learn how brief and misleading a madness it is with them! Seeing, as we saw, the acres of flying horsemen, half-spanned waggons, guns, and Cape carts furiously galloping across the flat plain between us and Bulwana, the most careful of commanders might have thought that the Boer army would never stand again. Our General was wrong, but let him who has been invariably right in this campaign throw the first stone.

In this account I have somewhat unfairly neglected the doings of the left attack, plainly visible to us during our clamber up the mountain-side. There is not much to describe: the advance of the Light Brigade was, as usual, a monotony of speed, gallantry, and dash. Their route lay across the low intersected land below the western slope of the mountains, and so up to the nek connecting them with Green Hill, still farther west. The nek was strongly held, the Boer laager lying immediately behind it; but though a considerable volume of fire came from its tangled, indefinite summit, it was, as in our case, checked and shaken by the deadly shrapnel from the hidden guns on Cingolo. Away on Hussar Hill, too, the heavy ordnance thundered salvo after salvo on to Green Hill, shrouding its whole bluff contour in a thick pall

of multi-coloured smoke, the terrific reports echoing and roaring down every little kloof and watercourse, multiplied a hundredfold into a stupendous tornado of sound. A Boer gun or two replied rapidly and accurately, firing at first at Hildyard's oncoming lines, then when they seemed hopelessly successful, at the Rifle Brigade in the van of Norcott's command. But they swept on, swarmed with fixed bayonets up through scrub and mealies, over the nek, and into the laager, just in time to catch a glimpse of the Boer gunners mounting to move out of action—mounting so smartly and with such evidence of drill that for the moment they were in sight the astonished riflemen stared at what they thought must be a British battery!

With the capture of the nek the day was won; the Fusilier Brigade was moved bloodlessly across to Hlangwani; Green Hill was tactically, and the enemy upon it speedily and practically, "out of it;" and as General Lyttelton, who had directed the whole great and successful movement, rode in amongst the advanced line of his own regiment, the Rifle Brigade, the roar of cheering that arose for him was not the smallest part of his triumph. A calm, gallant man, Lyttelton; no eyes in the British army keener and more soldierly, or more swift to see where

strong hands could deal a blow; none, moreover, more likely to grow moist, as his did, at the glorious shout of his men in his honour. There have been other men besides him who would have met untold sorrow with but a tightening of the lips, but who wept in the presence of the stentorian thanks of the soldiers they have led to glory.

At nightfall two distant Boer guns opened an accurate fire of shrapnel upon the men on Monte Cristo, which merely amused them, though many narrow shaves occurred. Our soldiers are curious people; it must be something more constitutional than bravery which makes them care little for fire when the day is doubtful, less when they are winning, nothing at all when they are losing or have lost.

February 19 and 20 were spent in consolidating the position: Colenso was made good by Hart's Brigade, Hlangwani was reinforced by Hildyard's men, and a reconnaissance in force pushed through the scrubby upland, which, sloping upward, terminates in the bluffs overlooking the Tugela opposite Pieter's Hill. The heavy intermittent shelling to which his troops were subjected during these operations might have warned the General that resistance was by no means at an end. Thrice during these two

days the writer's battalion was shelled from its bivouac and forced to take up a new and more sheltered one, and something very like an organised opposition met the reconnaissance even on our own bank of the river. The Boer takes a lot of learning: we had not learnt him then, nor have we yet, nearly two years after tackling his elements. I think his courage, tenacity, and dull, unpicturesque enthusiasm will never be fully mastered by our nation. We are not quick to grant our own attributes to others. How foolish, to put it on its lowest ground, it is in victors not to glory in the all but equality in fighting power of the men they have conquered. Granted or not, it is there.

On February 21 the pontoon was laid, and Wynne's Brigade, streaming confidently over, found themselves almost immediately hotly engaged on the kopjes below Grobler's Kloof. A stiff fight, beginning in the early evening, lasted until after dark, the exchanges of musketry being tremendous, and the brigade, ruefully retiring with the loss of its commander and 150 men, could have given a very succinct contribution to the natural history of Boer "demoralisation." It is the experiments that are vile when made on such fine bodies as the

Lancashire Brigade. A strained, uneasy night, murmur and movement all around, the unborn combat invading the mind of every sleeper, then at dawn on the 22nd a *réveillé* of shells amongst the bivouacs in front of Fort Wylie, and the battle of Pieter's Hill.

VII.

SOME EVENTS AND AN ARMISTICE.

PERHAPS one of the most curious incidents of that curious fourteen days' fighting, which began with the seizure of Hussar Hill and culminated in the storming of Pieter's Hill and the relief of Ladysmith, was the informal armistice for the burial of the dead, observed on Sunday, February 25. Not that it was the first of its kind in the history of the campaign up to that date, for both Colenso and Spion Kop had claimed a breathing-space for the gathering of their dreadful and, alas! abundant harvests. The peculiar interest of the truce of Pieter's Hill lay first of all in the almost unique positions of the belligerents at the time of its happening, and secondly in the remarkable opportunity afforded by those positions for self and enemy to satisfy a little of that curiosity to see something of each

other—otherwise than through the medium of a raised rifle-sight—which has unconfessedly possessed both sides throughout the campaign. Never in the history of warfare had combatants been so mutually mysterious. Prisoners there had been in plenty, but a prisoner is but an unplumaged bird, and a singularly taciturn one at that, as a rule. What little he knows he prefers to keep to himself, and on points of such deep interest as the mental "condition" of his late comrades, their views of the present situation, and their prognostications of the future, even the most garrulous specimens are as silent as the grave they have escaped; to say nothing of the fact that on our part, at least, a sentiment of fair play and good taste has seldom allowed of their being questioned on these *sacra arcana* of fighting men. But on that Sunday on Pieter's Hill something like Carlyle's "little row of naphtha-lamps" did glimmer for a short time on the obscurity with which long range rifles, longer range Creusots, and exasperatingly long range retirements had hitherto enwrapped our friend—the enemy.

But before relating what took place on that "death-dealing" hill it may be as well to

describe briefly the military position of the combatants, the frame which gave to the picture its striking character. Wednesday, February 14, witnessed at Chieveley the breaking up for the seventh time of the huge camp of Buller's relieving forces. Ever since the nightmare of Colenso (December 15) 25,000 men, with the "Red Bull"[1] at their head, had been groping along the foot of the heights, which form a natural parapet along the northern bank of the Tugela anywhere from Weenen to Acton Homes, trying here and trying there, "like a big rat trying to get into a barn," as a Dutch prisoner inelegantly put it. The history of those "tries" does not come within the scope of the present article, but Potgeiters, Spion Kop, and Vaal Krantz are the names by which they are known, and too well remembered. And now, on St Valentine's Day, another—and in any event, it was whispered, a last—attempt to break through that formidable cordon of Dutchmen and geological "freaks" was entered upon by the sudden swoop upon Hussar Hill. Then came the storming of Cingolo Mountain and Monte Cristo—a notable feat of Hildyard's Brigade, which has not attracted the attention it de-

[1] Sir Redvers Buller's *sobriquet* among the Boers.

serves — the hurried flight of the Boers from their fortress behind Colenso, followed on February 22 by the crossing of the Tugela for the fourth time, and that weird advance in the twilight, which has left more impression upon the minds of those who took part in it than any other incident of the campaign.

Amidst the incessant spitting and flashing of bullets, explosive and otherwise, Hart's Brigade made for Railway Hill, and Hildyard's for the flat-topped kopjes on the left of the railway. On the left of Hildyard, a battalion of the 60th Rifles; on their left again, slightly thrown back to guard the flanks, the Welsh Fusiliers, and I think the Rifle Brigade. Of Hart's movements that night I can say but little beyond that he was able to establish himself on the lower slopes of Railway Hill. My business lay on the plateau to his left, divided from him, as aforesaid, by the railway, and a broad, shallow watercourse, dry at this season. And a confused, indescribable sort of business it was in its early stages. Imagine a stony, steep hillside, undulating laterally into shallow depressions, and surmounted by the most indefinite and tricky of crest-lines, beyond which stretches a more or less level tract of

boulder-strewn plateau, and beyond that, the Boers — and the Unknown! Our battalions strung out along the steep, whose base is the river itself; here a company, there a company, no ordered allotment of posts, for who can give orders *instanter* when a hill supposed to be unoccupied is found to be very much occupied indeed? It is a fact for which I can vouch, that the 60th Rifles advanced with the comparatively peaceful intention of taking up a line of outposts for the night, all innocent, as were higher authorities than they, that a Boer commando had already actually entrenched the rear edge of the plateau, and pushed their own pickets forward to the crest-line, dominating the British advance. Behind the Rifles, the Devons were tramping solidly through the bullet-swept darkness, bayonets fixed, prepared for the "anything" it seemed extremely likely would happen. Behind them again, the Queen's, who with their fast friends the Devons, had "stuck it out" in many a hot, unreported corner since the fiery baptism they shared at Colenso. (A fine regiment, the Queen's, whose work throughout the war has not been less admirable because in the Irish-cum-Highland monopoly of public attention it has been done comparatively unnoticed.)

On their left the East Surrey, whose "gallery" work was yet to come, albeit it came quickly enough.

Subsequent events will never perhaps be thoroughly explained. Did the leading company of Rifles mistake the crest-line—as well they might—or were they ordered to take the position by assault? Their heroic commander, Captain the Hon. R. Cathcart, is beyond the reach of questions, for he lies buried among the boulders. What happened was unfortunately obvious enough. Up over the indefinite crest-line rushed the gallant "Sweeps," back fled the astonished Burghers, and away after them into the darkness charged and cheered that devoted company, totally unsupported, their very action unknown to those who might have supported them. A burst of fire from the trench ahead seems to have revealed the situation to them, and down, behind boulders and in depressions, they dropped, to await reinforcements before carrying the widely extending work in front of them. But no reinforcements came. Never a soul of the force which raggedly fringed the "hither" crest-line knew that a company of British infantry were scattered over the bare five hundred yards between themselves and the enemy. All night long that company lay there,

whilst millions of bullets passed over them (not *all* over, alas!) from the holders of the opposing crest-lines. At dawn the situation of the little band became intolerable. No supports had come, or seemed likely to come. The movement of a finger, even in that half-light, brought a devastating fire from the Mausers in front, and it is more than probable from the Lee-Metfords in rear. Nothing to do but to retire on what in the growing daylight was the only fire position to be found. So the word was given, and by twos and threes the backward movement began.

At this juncture the fix the 60th were in appears to have dawned upon the authorities, and two companies of the East Surrey were ordered forward, somewhat to the left of the plateau, to cover the retreat. Which suffered most, supporters or supported, I do not know for certain. The number of dead upon the hill-top seemed afterwards to be about equal. Let it suffice to say, that in a few moments over fifty men and two officers fell dead,—the gallant Cathcart the rearmost of his command, as he had been foremost in the charge of the night before. Poor Hinton of the East Surrey struck by an explosive bullet in the head; the colonel, second in command, and three other officers of the East Surrey, all severely wounded, the first

named in five or six places. Back to the crest-line dribbled the survivors, and then for a time nothing more except the incessant swish, swish of bullets from triumphant Boer and exasperated Briton. Time—dawn, on the morning of February 23.

About 7 A.M. some officerless men, who had pushed forward into a very advanced position on the extreme right, quitted the sorry shelter they had contrived to scrape together during that indescribable night, and, as officerless men will, retired to the crest-line, *en masse*, a splendid target for the merciless Mausers behind them. They too left their quota of corpses on the plateau, and disaster might have ensued at this point had not two companies of another regiment, the Devons, dashed forward through the press and reoccupied the deserted sangars, almost before the enemy had become aware that they were evacuated. Result, a storm of fire, luckily hurried and ineffective, followed by a nasty shelling from a diabolically accurate 3-inch Creusot, also comparatively harmless, though the West-Countrymen found but a bare twelve inches of small stones behind which to shelter when they dropped, breathless and expectant, into the lately deserted lines. Then another pause, utilised by the Queen's in audaciously

pushing forward two or three companies into other unoccupied sangars on the extreme right, the foremost of which was certainly not more than two hundred and fifty yards from the Boer trenches. Perhaps the gentle Burgher was breakfasting, or more likely resting, after his all-night vigil,—a relaxation to which, from a purely physical point of view, he was certainly entitled, for from 5 P.M. the previous night to 8 A.M. on this extraordinary morning he must have been manipulating his deadly little "bunches of fives"[1] absolutely without cessation. But the rest, or breakfast, or whatever it was, was of the briefest, and very soon the clack of the Mausers ("*clack*" at this range, "*click - clack*" at anything over a thousand yards) and the continuous pinging of bullets on the stones recommenced, though wellnigh inaudible amidst the incessant roll of our own deeper-toned Lee-Metfords. And so on for the rest of the day, without a pause, with hardly a slackening, whilst the men in the advanced sangars lay as flat as soles, and those lining the crest bobbed up and down—*pace* Sir Redvers[2]—and got rid of their two hundred rounds

[1] The clip containing the cartridges for the Mauser rifle holds five rounds.

[2] Sir Redvers Buller, in animadverting in an Aldershot

per man, with a good chance of a bullet in the brain accompanying every round thrust into the chamber. No time for Bisley æsthetics, when even the requisite five seconds' exposure attracts a like number of "leaden cores, with antimony and nickel jackets," boasting a velocity of 2500 "foot-seconds."

Meanwhile disastrous doings were in progress on Railway Hill, across the watercourse. The writer having no part in them (being indeed one of the "soles" in the advanced sangars at the time), they will not be described in detail. Briefly—Hart with the Irishmen attempting to storm Railway Hill, was met by such a tornado of fire from an unsuspected trench in front that he was forced to fall back to his bivouac on the lower slopes, leaving 150 dead among the rocks. A terrible venture from which the Inniskillings suffered most, returning with but four officers alive and unwounded. And so night fell, with the Irishmen unhappily huddled together at the foot of their fatal hill, taking what rest they might amidst continuous sniping, pom-pomming, and occasional shelling, whilst the stream of bullets still whistled and wailed *pizzicato* over

memorandum upon the practice of men "bobbing up" over cover to fire, and "bobbing down" again to load, laid it down that such methods were erroneous. "Battles," he said, "are not won by Jacks in boxes."

the plateau, across the railway, winding up over a sonorous *obligato* of shells during the last half hour of daylight. Not a cheerful day's work, and the "key"[1] apparently no nearer the lock than ever.

¶ The events of Saturday, February 24, need no description, chiefly, to use an Irishism, because there were none. In fact, barring that there was no attack, the sniping, shelling, and pom-pomming on hill and plateau were an exact replica of that of the previous day, the shelling perhaps more severe, and at times effective. The real movements of that day were unostentatious, but, to those "in the know," full of portent. They consisted in the reinforcement of the forces on Railway Hill by the East Surrey and West Yorkshire regiments, drawn from Hildyard's Brigade, and an admirably conducted massing of artillery on the heights echeloned opposite the Boer position, but on the southern bank of the river. But no member of Buller's army will ever forget the tense feeling which pervaded the air on that uneventful Saturday. A tiger crouching before it springs is a limp, nerveless creature compared to a host

[1] See Sir Redvers' speech to the troops at Spearmans, after the retirement from Spion Kop: "You have given me the key to Ladysmith."

of 25,000 desperate men preparing, perhaps unconsciously, for the onslaught that is to decide once and for ever the bloody quarrel of months. It is not too much to say that the relief of the 10,000 Britons beleaguered in Ladysmith overshadowed all else, even the ultimate issue of the whole campaign, in the minds of men and officers. Pretoria could wait; but comrades perishing of fever, starving on starved horseflesh, driven to hide like conies in holes and burrows from the pitiless shells, every one of which was a fresh insult to battalions who had helped to overthrow Napoleon himself, they could *not* wait, and no words of mine can describe the fulness of that pause before the final casting of the die.

The few, the very few soldiers who were not on the alert already at dawn on Sunday, the 25th, awoke with a sensation that "something was up." They may, indeed, have been actually roused by the unwonted silence reigning over hill and kopje, from which at bedtime—save the mark!—the previous night the discharge of rifles had been ringing as abruptly and as busily as ever. Some time elapsed before men were informed that an armistice had been agreed upon to bury the dead, and many a rifle which had only been awaiting a "good morning" from

the trenches in front was half-reluctantly unloaded, its owner preparing to put in some of his much overdue sleep, or to move a few yards right or left for the purpose of comparing notes with comrades, whom, perhaps, he had actually not seen for three days.

The business preliminaries of an armistice are not complicated, but they have a picturesqueness of their own which may be of interest, if the reader, like the writer, has never before accompanied a flag of truce into the no-man's land which lies between opposing forces during an undecided action. Certainly the occurrence has not been witnessed in British warfare since the Crimea. Whether we on that dead-strewn plateau conducted the affair "according to Cocker" I do not know, but the ceremony, such as it was, will be faithfully described, despite the risk of disapproval from experts—still to be found in the capacious arm-chairs of Pall Mall and Piccadilly—in the proper conduct of the amenities of war. Colonel Hamilton of the Queen's, with his white flag, is the central figure, an officer who had times and again advanced just as calmly towards Boer trenches with something very different in his hand. Behold him, then, standing erect, in the mathematically exact centre of the debatable ground, with the em-

blem of fraternity—so basely and constantly abused by the Dutchmen, to their eternal discredit—lifted high above his head. Behind him a group of perhaps a dozen officers of the line, most of them possessing no earthly right to be present (*quorum pars parva fui*), and behind them again the advanced guard of a trenchful of curious private soldiers, all rather self-conscious, but glancing with steady eyes around at the poor dead with which the rocky ground was covered. Oh, those dead! how still and how uncouth they lay, all dreadful and discoloured by three days of tropical sun, and three damp, oppressive nights. Who can say that there is beauty in death? Certainly there is none in violent death, though in rare instances the body, so swiftly robbed of life, does fall into lines of dignity and nobility. But mostly the awesomely immobile form looks what it is—stricken, and, one would swear, shocked at its fate. There is little mistaking a dead man at any distance. Be the pose never so lifelike, there is an angularity, an utter nonchalance, an irresponsibility about the prone figure that fixes the attention at once. The writer will never forget awaking in the grey of the morning after a night on picket, and on taking a look round over the slumbering forms of the men off duty,

suddenly becoming aware that a corpse—overlooked in the hurried removal of the dead who had fallen, when the kopje had been assaulted in the dusk of the previous evening—had slept the first night of his eternal sleep hard by the sleeping soldiers. There was nothing in the position of the cold body to differentiate it from the warm, living ones stretched around it; but the vast gulf lay between them, and one glance was enough to show on which side of the abyss lay each khaki-clad figure.

But all this is a digression. For a few moments—rather anxious ones it may be said—Colonel Hamilton and his little following stood motionless among the motionless dead, every eye fixed on the Boer trench, and a lively wonder in every mind as to what sort of entity would presently emerge therefrom. Behind, on our crest-line, all was silent as the grave; ahead, the same uncanny stillness. Suddenly a blunt-looking head emerged, apparently from the earth itself, followed by another, and another, outlined sharply against the clear green of Grobler's Kloof, a vast, hummocky, grass-clad mountain, whose outline had dogged us from Dan to Beersheba, from Colenso to Sugar-Loaf Hill. Then two or three figures showed openly on the parapet, their uprising

reminding one of nothing so much as that of a gamekeeper straightening his back from the cramp of setting his traps in a weasel run.

But there was nothing of the gamekeeper about the man who first strode forward to meet us. Seldom have I set eyes on a more magnificent specimen of male humanity than the commandant of the trenchful of Boers, Pristorius by name, a son of Anak by descent, and a gallant, golden-bearded fighting-man by present occupation; for in far-away Middleburg those mighty limbs—he told it us without any of that stupid deprecation which would probably have characterised a similar confession on the part of an Englishman—were wont to stretch themselves beneath a lawyer's desk. Close on his heels came what a person who had never seen Boers before would have thought the strangest band of warriors in the world: old men with flowing, tobacco-stained, white beards; middle-aged men with beards burnt black with the sun and sweat of their forty years; young men, mostly clean shaven, exhibiting strongly the heavy Dutch moulding of the broad nose and chin; big boys in small suits; suits of all kinds and colours, tweed, velveteen, homespun, and "shoddy," all untidy in the extreme, but mostly as serviceable as

their wearers. The only sign of a uniform was the turn-out of Pristorius himself, a suit of well-made khaki, studded with silver buttons and silver stars wherever there was room for button or star. A gentleman, and a dandy, this Pristorius, who bewailed comically the loss of his boots and hair-brushes in the scurry from Monte Cristo. "Monte Cristo, you call it!" laughed he; "I call it a small Hell!"

But it must not be supposed that the conversation became general, as the novelists say, all at once, despite the affability of the commandant. At first a marked disposition showed itself in each little party to remain clustered round its leader, and even when the Britishers had stared and thawed sufficiently to allow them to separate, and endeavour to engage in conversation individuals of their momentary friends the enemy, the latter still evinced a reserve, tempered with sullenness, and a slight admixture of rudeness, which rendered a *rapprochement* a task requiring no little tact and diplomacy. How they hate and suspect us, those ignorant back-country farmers! One can trace generations of misinformation and self-sufficiency in their lowering eyes, and the ungainly arrogance and assertiveness of their gestures.

Here, too, it was very evident that it was much more difficult for them to conceal the natural discomposure which all men feel in the presence of the silent dead than for their more artificial opponents. From the airy and easy demeanour of the uniformed British officers, that dreadful plateau might have been the lobby of a London club. A Briton is at all times prone to conceal his emotions, and certainly in this instance the idiosyncrasy gave him a great social advantage over the superstitious Burghers, with their sidelong glances and uneasy shiftings. But as time went on matters improved, and presently the writer found himself plunged into quite an animated discussion on the merits and demerits of night attacks with a deep-chested old oak-tree of a man, whose swarthy countenance was rendered more gipsy-like by the addition of earrings. The opening of the conversation had its humours. "Good morning!" quoth I. "Gumorghen," rumbled the oak-tree sourly. "Surely we can be friends for five minutes," I ventured, after a pause. The rugged countenance was suddenly, not to say startlingly, illumined with a beaming smile. "*Why* not, indeed! *why* not, officer! have you any tobacco?" Out came my pouch, luckily filled to bursting that very

morning, and the oak-tree proceeded to stuff a huge pipe to the very brim, gloating over the fragrance of the "best gold flake" as he did so. The rumour of tobacco had the effect of dispelling the chill that still lingered on the outskirts of that little crowd, and many a grimy set of fingers claimed their share as the price of the friendship of the owners, the commandant himself not disdaining to accept a fill with a graceful word of thanks. They were out of tobacco in that trench, it appeared, and suffering acutely from the deprivation of what to a Boer is more necessary than food. Was I guilty of "aiding and abetting the Queen's enemies" by thus easing their torments for a while?

Meantime a little army of stretcher-bearers had come up, and were busy removing the corpses and the three or four unhappy men who had managed to keep the spark of life in their poor bodies during those terrible three days and nights. I spoke to two of these survivors, and learned some curious facts about the men whose bullets had condemned them to the almost unimaginable torments of mind and body they had endured. The Boers, it appears, had not left these lonely wretches untended, though they would have ruthlessly shot down any one from

our side who left cover to carry the sufferers in. As a matter of fact it was not known that there were any wounded on the plateau at all. Once in the night a gruff voice, apparently from within a yard or two of our most advanced sangars, had shouted out in the darkness and silence, "*Why don't you come out and look after your wounded?*" but alas for Boer morality! the strange cry in the night had but been taken for a "plant," a ruse to lure our riflemen from their shelters, and the men who heard it only gripped their weapons the firmer, and prepared for a rush, congratulating themselves as they crouched, every nerve strained in listening, on their own "slimness."

By this time the plateau was presenting quite an animated scene. Parties of Boers and British officers were strolling about in all directions, never approaching *too* near their respective defences. Here stood a little group of Dutchmen around a Briton, there a like number of Britons around an interesting Boer. A young officer of the Devons was busily engaged in preparing to take a snap-shot of the scene. Up rushes a youthful Boer, an ill-kempt, emasculated stripling, beseeching that his unlovely form might not be omitted from the picture. It was amusing to see the anxiety on his unhealthy face, and the

gratified smile, which answered the bronzed young Englishman's good-natured one of acquiescence, and then the self-conscious awkwardness of the youngster's subsequent pose for the operation whose results he would never see.

My next conversational effort was with a tall, shifty-looking Dutchman who appeared somewhat "out of it," whom, therefore, feelings of hospitality prompted me to try and put at his ease. (We English, I think, all inexplicably felt as if we were the hosts and the Boers guests on this occasion. Was it from a premonition that forty-eight hours hence that hill-top would be trod by no man without our permission?) After a few desultory remarks upon the weather, horse-sickness, the prospects (agricultural only) of the next few weeks, &c., &c., the Burgher's share in which was chiefly monosyllabic and none too civil, I at last blurted out a question I had been longing to put all the morning, as soon as relations should be established on a sufficiently friendly footing. "Aren't you fellows sick of this?" I said. "How much longer do you intend to keep us out here, and yourselves from your farms and families?" The reply was more frank than I had expected. "Of course we don't like it any more than you do; but, three years, yes! three years we will stay out and fight!"

This with an air as if to say, "There! if that doesn't astonish you, I don't know what will!"

"But, my friend," I replied unveraciously, "we *do* like it; it is our trade—what we live for and by; and as to three years, why, we are prepared to fight you for thirty, if necessary!"

The Boer seemed surprised, and hadn't the wit to hide it. Probably the idea of a standing army is ungraspable by a real back-country guerilla republican. "Er—er—ah—er, some settlement will come before then, is it not?" he murmured. I shook my head portentously, as if to imply that there could be but one settlement, the undiscussable one of unconditional surrender.

Several of his comrades then joined us, amongst them one or two of those offensive little half-bred French and Germans, about whom one wonders nothing so much as the reason why the big solemn Boers allow them to sully the dignity of their commandoes. One of these, an under-sized, red-headed atrocity, with inferior teeth, and a water-bottle stolen from a wounded man on Spion Kop (he informed me of this himself), was also full of the subject of night attacks. "Why do you seely beoble kip on, kip on wiz your night attags? You find us asleeb neffer.

You are shot, efery one; look 'ere!" and he pointed to the corpses on every side. "It is very sad," chimed in a compatriot unctuously, and as I maintained a discreet silence the subject did not flourish, though one or two Dutchmen maintained a voluble argument on it amongst themselves for some time.

"Ah! but the armoured train at Frere, zat was ze sing," was the next remark I understood. "Ve was sorry for your brafe beoble, ja wohl!"

Pristorius, in his gentlemanly way, next claimed the public ear, and the burden of his speech was—explosive bullets! Rather a staggerer this for his British hearers, who had lived for the last three days amidst an incessant shower of these unlawful projectiles. But the lawyer of Middleburg well knew the advantage of a "first plaint," and very grave and judicial were his remarks upon our shortcomings in this respect. Every prisoner, he averred, had been relieved of hundreds of split, dum-dum, and explosive bullets, until a pile "so high"—he indicated a height of about five feet with one hand—stood upon Bulwana as a cairn, a monument to British perfidy. It was in vain that the impossibility of such a thing was pointed out. His commandantship listened in well-bred

silence, and a well-bred and hardly perceptible shrug of his mighty shoulders.

"Let us talk no more of it, it is politics!" he said with a smile, and brushed the crucial question aside as easily as he had done many more which threatened to mar the harmony of the proceedings.

About this time our men from the sangars in rear were approaching somewhat too closely to the strolling Boer soldiery on the plateau, and the commandant began to get weary. At his request, therefore, both sides were ordered back to their lines, an operation carried out by the Dutchman by a mere wave of the arm, and a loud monosyllable like the cry of a corncrake. Our men thereupon retired, with an expression of face that plainly said, that where a Boer could walk there would a British soldier walk also, until the rights of the matter were settled *vi et armis*. It was funny to notice the demeanour of Mr Atkins when in such equivocal close quarters to his foeman as that permitted by a truce in the middle of a long and bloody battle It must be confessed that it was somewhat of the melodramatic order, doubtless a not ineffective method of impressing imaginations so crude as those of the back-country Boers. I do not think that there was a single private soldier of her

Majesty's forces on that hill-top who had not got his arms folded across his breast! Thus they advanced, thus they stood and stared at their loose-jointed opponents, and thus they retired at the word of command, slowly and gravely, the embodiment of dignified discipline. Rather to my relief, the Boers *did* appear impressed. These red-necks were no "junkers," but bearded men, with all the bronze and fitness of four months' continuous campaigning upon them. Who can say but that this informal private view had some effect on the triumphant finale of two days later?

By this time—nearly 6 P.M.—the last dead had been collected and buried; the wearied and saddened chaplain had said the last solemn words over the huge grave containing the husks of so many brave departed spirits. The truce was at an end, though the influence of it lingered for a while even after Briton and Boer had parted with a wave of the hand or a ceremonious salute, or, as in more than one case, a curiously inscrutable *auf wiedersehen*. Not a shot broke the deathly stillness of that Sunday evening until 10 P.M., when apparently some overwrought Boer "had to let off or shout," as a recruit once said in explanation of a shot fired by him during a night march at Aldershot! From that moment

up to the terrific culmination of artillery and musketry fire on Tuesday, February 27, there was never again a cessation of the firing.

The bombardment and storming of Pieter's Hill is a story of itself. A story of ninety-five heavy guns thundering lyddite and shrapnel on to crowded trenches; of the roar and rattle of 30,000 rifles, and of thirty Maxims; of brave Boers who stood up like men in the infernal hail, and braver Britons who rushed and cheered, and slew and spared as their fathers had done before them; of terrified men on ponies, flying, and fighting with one another for a way from the pursuing peril behind; and eventually of silence, and the almost whispered word—"The job is done at last, Ladysmith is relieved!"

VIII.

AFTER LADYSMITH.

On Saturday, March 3, the relieving army marched through the pale, exhausted ranks of the relieved. No description of that immortal meeting is necessary, no Briton but has read of it again and again. Yet no one except one who was present will ever be able to feel the spell of it. Like all the really pregnant things of the earth, it is beyond the art of the word-painters, who have tried their skill upon it and often spoilt it, painting cheering, dancing figures, tears and antics of joy, embracings. There was none of this: the garrison were but just able to stand, much less dance; hundreds could not stand, but crouched or sat in the ranks, a piteous guard of honour. The bronzed sweating thousands passed through that army of shrunken ghosts in all but absolute silence, more eloquent than volleys of hurras. The only approach to cheering I heard was a long

murmur, more like a sigh than a cheer, which rippled along the lines as the vanguard of Dublins swung in sight, and a subdued shout as the Devons and Rifle Brigade swept through their brother ranks at four miles an hour, glancing from side to side, with a rough hail here and there as old pals caught each other's eyes, but mostly in silence. The infamous stage management of the thing rather aided than detracted from its unspeakable dramatism. Buller's men were hurried through the town, tired, unfed, straining with the exertion of an over-swift march, with little breath for cheering, and little time to see anything to cheer at. Not one man in a thousand perceived Sir George White sitting upon his horse in front of the Town Hall, with that on his handsome face which would have been worth 500 guineas on canvas. The garrison had already stood, or tried to stand, two hours before the advance-guard passed through, and were unfeignedly glad to see the rear-guard. So that the visible enthusiasm was almost nil, the invisible too deep and significant to have appeared, even if relievers and relieved had been given time to leap and weep over each other for the benefit of the illustrated papers. Such shows are un-British and undignified in conception, and it is pretty safe to say that it was not only the speed and discomfort of this one which

caused it to be the solemn thing it was: British privates have too much natural restraint and dignity of their own to have gratified the staring pencillers in any case. So the pencillers revenged themselves by portraying what might have been had the two armies but worn baggy breeches and *képis* instead of war-stained helmets and khaki. Take my word for it, of that magnificent veteran army of Natal, or of that magnificent shadow of the garrison of Ladysmith, not one man wept, not one danced, not one threw up his helmet, or embraced, or otherwise behaved as a foreign merry-andrew; and there was not one who had not in his heart a flood of gratitude that he had lived to see that day, and pride that its glory was in some measure shared by his infinitesimal self.

For some weeks after, the career of the Natal army was uneventful, and is best told in diary form. Bivouac night of 3rd March under Surprise Hill; marched on 7th to Modder Spruit, where after Pieter's Hill the whole Boer transport had lain awaiting capture, moving off thankfully and in astonishment when the expected swarm of horsemen did not come. Next day to Sunday's river and Elandslaagte, camping on the vast meadow, which is to the mighty Biggarsberg what the sea is to Dover Cliff. The enemy, the cup of Ladysmith dashed from his lips, was

known to have "brought to" on this formidable range, and the army was in no state for immediate operations on a prolonged scale. The men were worn out and almost naked, boots were worn out, horses were worn out, everything was worn out except over-confidence, and this spread out a mighty encampment within range of the second strongest and best prepared position in Natal.

The Boers were apparently worn out too, for it was not until April 10 that they awoke the British force from its long drowse[1] by shelling it smartly and accurately from dawn to dusk, necessitating a hasty and undignified exit O.P., first to the Elandslaagte kopjes, then back to the vicinity of Ladysmith.

Here another wait until 7th May, when General Buller began that remarkable series of flank marches which cleared Natal of the enemy, and all but cleared himself of the shadow his early misfortunes had brought upon him. Speed and decision replaced pottering and lethargy; instant and continuous success were the fruits.

[1] There is nothing to cavil at in this inaction. It was absolutely necessary from the reasons given, and also because it formed part of Lord Roberts' great northern movement. A premature attack, if successful, would have set the Boer army running with a clear course; if unsuccessful, might have released a strong Boer force to pass through the Drakensberg passes and fall upon the right flank of the army in the Free State, already sufficiently occupied.

Holding the berg in front with Hildyard's Division, who moved up the railway, mending it as they marched, he swept with splendid *élan* around the eastern flank, marching through miles of burning grass, gaining ridge after ridge before the deluded Boers could gallop across in strength from the berg to hold the trenches already prepared across the Dundee road. Here and there they stood for a few moments—at Helpmakaar village on the 13th, and at Blesbok-laagte next day; but his momentum was irresistible, and on May 15 he was in Dundee. One day's rest here—never better deserved—and at evening on May 18 the army swung into Newcastle at the end of a twenty-four miles' march, with the berg humping its mighty shoulders far behind them, and its erstwhile defenders racing in disorder northwards, outflanked, outmarched, out-generalled, and shamefully indebted to the kinsmen of the men they fled from for the saving grace of the only feeble opposition they had offered.[1]

[1] Lynch, the chief of the Irish commando, tells in a most interesting article in the 'Revue de Paris' the story of this stampede. Time and again was he asked to make a stand, with a promise that the flying Dutchmen would re-form behind him. Being British, though an apostate, he did so; being Dutch, the fugitives thought no more of their promise than they did of the effect of breaking it. Lynch had often all he knew to get back.

Next day Buller pushed his advanced-guard to Ingogo, and here, on the very site of Colley's first reverse, paused perplexedly in front of Laing's Nek for three weeks, whilst exhausted supplies were being replenished, and Hildyard's and Lyttelton's Divisions closed up—the former from Utrecht, the latter from Vryheid, both of which places had formally surrendered to the British generals. Laing's Nek was a puzzle indeed, though only an accident made it so. So fast were the Boers running that it is exceeding probable they would have passed over the tremendous position in their flight, as they had done over others nearly as strong in their *déroute* across the Helpmakaar Ridge. But a *deus ex machinâ* in the shape of the Wakkerstroom commando, coming fresh and full of fight away from Lord Roberts' front to their invaded district, stayed the demoralised Lydenburgers, Zoutpansbergers, Carolina men, and others, and a formidable force was soon steadied on the already prepared position. At the same time a number of half-hearted Free Staters were suddenly fired by the news of thousands of British soldiers in *their* fertile land, and went westwards to see about it, a curious "general post," which, however, only stiffened Chris. Botha's army, and added

a few more "runners" to Lord Roberts' colossal "drive."

On May 30 that general was in Elandsfontein, and Botha's communications were cut. By the laws of war his position was now untenable, a fact speedily made known to him by Sir Redvers in an interview held on June 2 under the shadow of Majuba—a curious interview, in which the British certainly got the worst of the verbal exchanges.

"Surrender!" says Sir Redvers. "Never!" says Botha. "Why not?" says Sir Redvers. "Because if I do," replies Botha, with all a Dutchman's exasperating grasp of the obvious, "you will have a big advantage and I a big loss!" "Ha! ha! Never thought of that; so you will," says Sir Redvers (to himself). Sir Redvers then remarks that he hates war. So does Botha. Sir Redvers says he has stopped all firing since he sent his letter asking for an interview. So has Botha. Sir Redvers says that the Boer Government has been telling lies. Botha cordially agrees. An awkward pause! Commandant Edward, stupid, practical man, then chimes in with a definite request for a definite proposal. "Abandon your position with all guns upon it," propounds Sir Redvers, "and run away to your homes, keeping your

rifles as a great treat." He deplores the war, and would like them all to live happily ever after. Botha, curiously enough, would like the same, but has not at present sufficient presence of mind to answer the astounding definity preceding the pious wish. But he will ask his Government, and will reply by the evening of the 5th.[1] Good, and until then an armistice, during which the Boers dig and the Britons on Mount Prospect and the banks of the Buffalo were not sorry to have a few days' respite from the sonorous attentions of the big gun on Pougwana, which had been steadily shelling them with immense but nearly harmless shrapnel ever since the bivouacs had been taken up.

It was a gallant attempt of General Buller's; but the trenches and gun-pits just opposite had not been dug and blasted to repel words. Had Botha yielded to his cooing, the reputation of the Boers for "slimness" would have vanished for ever, and a brand-new one been miraculously manufactured for the English. For the proposals were not without their cunning (afterwards confessed), and as they were unsuccessful one may be forgiven for a

[1] Needless to say, this is not a verbatim report of the debate, but it is very near it; *vide* despatches.

wish that the jam of unction over the powder had been a little less thick and "slobbery"!

Duly at dusk on June 5, Botha sent in the reply of his "Government," and Pougwana began again, answered by the heavy artillery from Inkwelo, from whose lofty summit two frozen companies of the Rifle Brigade surveyed mankind from China to Peru, whilst their less speculative but warmer comrades clustered around its foot. That shrapnel from Pougwana was a liberal education. Fused at 10,000 yards, it rained over Mount Prospect with a precision undreamt of in the *borné* philosophy of our artillerists, causing but a few casualties only because of the immense height at which it was burst, a defect inseparable from the cloud-clapped situation of the gun. It had been one of the hobbies of old Piet Joubert to see a heavy gun on the mountain, and there, in spite of the opposition of his lieutenants, it was with herculean labour dragged. It is a question for military economists to answer, whether the wounding of two men by it were results adequate to the expenditure of muscle and profanity in getting it there.

And now General Buller, exchanging words for deeds, was ready to trace the second loop of the brilliant S-shaped march which had

brought him up from Ladysmith. Placing a dot in the concavities of the letter to represent strong Boer positions, the reader will get an exact idea of his progress, and will, moreover, have compiled for himself a compendium or *memoria technica* of perfect modern tactics. It was unquestionably a fine performance, and only ended in a battle because no imaginable manœuvring can sidle an army around an endless cliff with a hostile force upon its summit. As it was, the resulting battle, as will be seen, was, by admirable management, as small as possible.

The early buffets of the war have, I think, produced a curiously paradoxical danger for an absolutely fearless nation and army—namely, that of being over-cautious to cast the die in a pitched battle. It is a fault on the right side, but may be easily exaggerated into weakness. There must be battles in war, and bloody ones in such a war as this. But the battle to be described, which commenced with the seizure of Van Wyk's Hill, on the southern side of Botha's Pass, on June 6, was nothing but a triumph for its stout-hearted old director, and ended his heavy task, as every single soldier under him would for his sake have given his all to have seen it begun, with glory.

IX.

ALMOND'S NEK.

A SMALL battle that did a big thing. We have learnt enough of the Boers during the last ten months to be able to plume ourselves on having done a good day's work when we turn 5000 of them out of a position literally terraced with trenches, nodulous with gun-pits, flanked by two mountains, the whole commanding a natural glacis about ten miles long! Without undue complacency a feat of this sort may fairly be termed a "big thing," and that is what the cheerful little hurly-burly at Almond's Nek did for her Majesty's and Natal's sake.

That appalling trinity of natural barriers—Majuba, Laing's Nek, and Pougwana—which had frowned for so many days on General Buller's little force, encamped on the far side of the Ingogo river, frowned in vain on that Monday afternoon, June 11. Just at their most

"frowny" time—sundown—when the big clouds love to pile themselves angrily up behind anything grim and angry-looking on the earth beneath, and all the still South African air seems to be waiting for something awesome to happen, at that precise period about 6000 of those ugly little khaki figures, which had insulted their grandeur for so long, were gazing complacently at their innocuous backs twelve miles away to the westward. In other words, they were "turned," and as harmless as Primrose Hill.

There must always be a touch of the ludicrous in a successful turning movement to any mind whose sense of humour has not wholly succumbed to the melancholy of the veldt. Picture the weeks and weeks of digging the now disappointed Boers must have enjoyed before they could render a position so vast what it is—impregnable, a very Gibraltar looking out over a grassy sea; digging, too, in earth of heart-breaking and tool-breaking adamant, even requiring heavy blast-charges in places, before the semblance of cover is obtained! Think of the planning, the anxious disposition of trenches for the commandos to hand, the no less anxious distribution of commandos for the trenches, the cogitations as to lines of attack, and the careful

placing of the gun-pits and epaulements to meet or enfilade them! If the reader has ever been burdened with the preparation of a position in any country other than basaltic South Africa, let him double—if he be a civilian, or an unsalted soldier, let him quadruple—in his mind the sum of the difficulties he can imagine appertaining to such a task. Neither soldier nor civilian will be exaggerating the industry and herculean toil of the Boers if he apply the results of his calculation to the work done on Laing's Nek. The writer has been over every entrenched position in Natal, including, probably, at least three of the strongest in the history of defensive warfare, but he can safely say that the only one he was mercifully *not* required to negotiate "on business"—this very one of Laing's Nek—was infinitely the most impossible of them all. But there was a "way round," as the American attaché remarked to General Buller after Colenso, and General Buller saw it, and took it, to appear again on the other side, wherein—to my mind at least—there is no small amount of humour, which one can enjoy as froth, when the consummate generalship beneath it has been properly imbibed. One is tickled at little in South Africa. I have seen a knot of men laugh at the ineffectual explosion of a 40-lb. shell in their midst, so that

perhaps my amusement is untimely. However, to our tale, and how it befell that her Britannic Majesty's troops in Natal were set at a mole-hill instead of the mountain they expected, though even then they would have charged manfully at the dreadful leap, so great is the trust in the strong pair of hands on the reins.

June 8 saw the seizure of Botha's Pass, one of the "might have beens" of the campaign, when the scanty Dutch garrison on the tremendous battlements and buttresses of the Drakensberg fled before a frontal attack which looked like folly to a casual observer, though it was, in truth, the outcome of careful reconnaissance. What a shambles the deep valley between Inkweloane and Spitz Kop would have been had Botha only manned his outwork in time! Inkweloane is like a huge hand to the body of the main position on the nek, and, even if no turning movement had been intended, its loss was a serious menace to the Boer stronghold. Once in our possession, Laing's Nek *might* have fallen to a frontal attack. Denied to our artillery, it never could have. First trick to the British, albeit with a difficult hand with which to play up to it. June 9, nothing particular on the surface, though there was a mighty pulling and hauling of baggage over the steep summit of the

pass, whilst the half-frozen troops thawed slightly in the wintry sunlight on the top of the Drakensberg, and wondered how they had ever got there, as they glowered down into the chasms from which they had crept the day before. June 10, a march westwards over rolling veldt, here and there burnt into great black patches, from which a most pungent and irritating dust arose to annoy the troops and hide the unusual picturesqueness of the scene. It is not often that an army is able to bowl along over a huge meadow, which reaches to the horizon, in parallel columns, the baggage-train, as good as the best, well up alongside. The halting-place for the night was Gans-Vlei Spruit, from the kopje overlooking which a couple of hundred Boers with a field-gun had been hustled by the South African Light Horse and other cavalry before the arrival of the main column. The latter bivouacked on the flats below, sleeping as well as the intense frost of the night would allow; the 11th brigade under the shadow of the kopje itself, the 10th brigade about the road below it, and on lower ground still the veterans of the force, Colonel Hamilton's 2nd brigade, whose late commander, General Hildyard,—now raised to divisional rank,—had still further gilded his gilt spurs by his admirable management of the

assault on Botha's Pass, of which he was in sole charge. An astute man, and a cool-headed, as becomes a former Chief-Professor of the Staff College, prone to writing orders of unprecedented lucidity and soundness, one of the pioneers of this wilderness of a war, withal, who had struck the first little chip from the tree, when he sent his bayonets forward at Willow Grange, so long ago as November. If he will pardon criticism from one who, by Queen's Regulations, is only permitted to be criticised, let me here lay it down that there is no general officer in this army of South Africa who has more speedily, certainly, and deservedly won the confidence of his subordinates than General Hildyard, from the day when he saved as many lives of his brigade as could be saved from the devastating *inferno* raging around them at Colenso by his timely adoption of extended order, to the movement when that same brigade, with others, was triumphantly nursed by him on to the knobby summit of Almond's Nek. But this is anticipation.

The morning of June 11, a typical morning here at this season, cold and clear, saw the army early astir, beating and stamping its 30,000 benumbed legs and arms, waiting for the five-o'clock breakfast, the smoke of whose wood-fires

rose filmy and aromatic on the still, frosty air. The briefest of ceremonies, breakfast, when "things is in the wind," and Quaker oats and cocoa the only fare. Then a hasty donning of dingy weather-worn braces, whose honourable scars and blemishes would send an Aldershot sergeant-major raging over to Broadmoor, followed by the gradual coagulation of dust-coloured parallelograms formed by battalions falling in. Then a long wait. The edges of the parallelograms begin to wobble and disintegrate; men are being allowed to fall out, and sit down. No hurry evidently, a state of things which in the presence of an enemy may indicate either one of two antitheses,—either that the coast is clear or that that worm, the foe, has been picked up by the scouts, the early birds of warfare, in large numbers ahead, requiring much scratching of heads and "dispositions" by invisible staffs and general officers. The present hesitation arose from a mixture of the two. Almond's Nek lies about seven miles north-east of Gans-Vlei, and was known to hold the enemy, or rather was so certain to do so that it was actually assumed to be "Boered." Between the two places runs a low ridge of grass-fronted kopjes, protected in front by a wet spruit, enjoying flank defence and an ideal line of retreat—quite

a likely draw for Boers, and absolutely necessary for the general to know if there were any there, and if so, how many. Out creeps the 11th brigade to see; long strings of men looking slim and black as they top the ridge that bounds the basin we stand in, and disappear line by line down the other side.

Another long wait for us behind, a somewhat anxious one this time. Conversation begins to assume that slightly vague and distrait manner which, one can notice, settles ever upon soldiers in safety when their comrades of other units are marching out into possible danger and death. After two hours the word comes back at last, "All clear so far, the rest to move on." The kopjes were empty, and for the rest of the day were handed over to the brigade which would have stormed them had storming been necessary.

No time was lost by the 2nd and 10th brigades in setting out, the latter on the right, working along a low saddle connecting Gans-Vlei kopje with the lately problematical ridge ahead, the former across a broad plain, preceded by the naval artillery, consisting of two 4·7 monsters, and six little sturdy 12-pounders, undoubtedly the "handy-men" of the campaign. Their place in the order of march is noteworthy,

in that, at a later stage of the operations, it gave rise to a somewhat unique situation, heavy guns finding themselves occupying for a short time an artillery position actually in advance of their infantry. On the extreme right, invisible to the infantry, were Lords Dundonald and Gough, flanked on their right by a very nasty bit of mountainous ground; on the extreme left, Brocklehurst with his cavalry, very much alive to the fact that a commando was hovering on his outer flank. And so the advance proceeded for about an hour and a half across the yellow veldt, with the naval guns making a stately show as they lumbered across the flat centre of the plain, a little bunch of infantry (with whom was the writer) ahead, similar bunches on either flank, and behind, the parallel blocks of the 2nd brigade in columns of route,—another unusual *spectacle* in this land of creepings and crawlings, of tortuous dongas, and surprise packets in the shape of sudden kopjes and hidden spruits.

The ridge intervening between the nek and our night's bivouac was reached about mid-day, and from its low crest the Boer position could be discerned about 6000 yards ahead, with yet another ridge, or rather plateau, between us and it, about 3500 yards from us, and consequently

somewhere near 2500 yards from the enemy. It was therefore already perfectly possible to shell the nek, and the question arose as to the desirability of pushing the heavy ordnance on to the next ridge, thereby ensuring a crushing bombardment at short range, or of being contented with the very fair position already gained. The absence of the enemy on the intervening ground, and the advantages of the co-operation of the field-guns and howitzers with their big brethren of the sea, decided the point, and the column moved forward again. It was at this juncture that the peculiar situation of the naval artillery became apparent. Accompanied only by their scanty infantry escort, they forged right ahead of the main body, and actually arrived upon the dominating top of the plateau, with nothing between them and the Boers but empty ether, and the sublime self-reliance of the mariner on shore. But this was one of our lucky days. Brightly shone the sun, none of that fierce bite in its glare that will remind certain of the Queen's soldiers of December 15, 1899, whenever they feel it again as long as they live; genial was the air, and blew softly upon the brow of the genial sailor-man, to cool him after his "yo-heave-oh'ing" at the heavy tackle up the slope. All was well, the show was "just

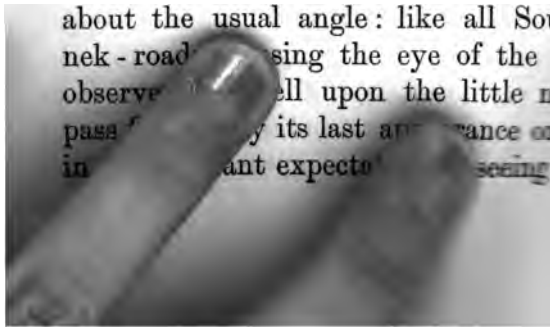
about to commence" under the most cheerful auspices, and "Philomels" and "Fortes" spat upon their horny hands and hitched at their "brass-bound" breeches with the grin of a pugilist who knows that he is good enough for the five to one *on* odds intrusted to him.

I dwell upon this *ante-prœlium* cheerfulness, firstly, because—*pace* historical novelists and impressionist war-correspondents—it is not at all a usual state of mind with troops going into action; and, secondly, because it inexplicably pervaded all ranks on this brilliant June morning. Almond's Nek was a cheerful battle; from start to finish it "went," so to speak, with a slap, and a dash, and a grin. None of your crises or "doubtful moments" about this affair. Doubtful moments there were, but the men wotted nothing and cared less for them, which is sufficient in itself to banish all doubtfulness from any moment which ever fled away into the æons of time. But this is again anticipation.

Though the big guns can certainly boast of having sighted the enemy first, the infantry were not far off, and were soon collected in manageable proximity under the lee-side of the plateau, 10th brigade still on the right, 2nd brigade still on the left. Away behind on last ridge lay the 11th brigade, no doubt

with field-glasses and telescopes as their comrades ahead now were with bully-beef and biscuit. What conceivable cataclysm shall rob the British soldier of his dinner at 1 P.M.? None that I can think of. He devoured it moving forward under a rain of bullets at Colenso; he munched it lying prone under the terrific storm of shells at Vaal Krantz; nor did he miss it on more than one of the four extraordinary days of Pieter's Hill, and then only because it could not be brought to him to eat, and a man may not go to find it without permission. And now behold him hard at it, a mile and three-quarters this side of the enemy, whom—if he is thinking about him at all—he proposes to reduce also to mincemeat within the next two hours.

Almond's Nek is a curiously shaped feature, used as one is to Nature's juggling feats with earth and boulder in this country. About the nek itself there is nothing particular to notice. There is the usual mile or mile and a half's breadth of grassy down, and the usual "road"—save the mark!—disappearing over its centre at about the usual angle: like all South African nek-road[illegible] sing the eye of the imaginative observe[illegible] ll upon the little niche in the pass[illegible] its last ar[illegible]ance on the crest in[illegible]ant expecto[illegible] seeing something



come over it—a Kaffir, or a horseman, or a long creeping span of oxen with their little hummock of a waggon behind. Neks derive their characters solely from their walls—that is to say, the kopjes or mountains which shut them in, and *make* them neks. Those of the present example are sufficiently extraordinary. Viewed hastily from our artillery position, the general impression would have been of a tall and perfect isosceles triangle of a kopje on the right, apparently isolated, outlined against an indefinite mass of cliff slightly higher than itself. On the left a perpendicular wooded bluff, with two more tiny isosceles triangular kopjes in front of it, nestling, so to speak, against the lower part of its dark-green bosom. A pretty correct impression on the whole, with certain important omissions necessary to be filled in before the difficulties of the assault can be understood. To begin with, a glance through a field-glass from a position slightly to the left of the guns betrays the fact that the tall kopje on the right is not isolated at all, but connected with the cliff behind by a razor-backed saddle with steep sides. Herein lies its danger to us: it has a line of retreat, and is therefore certain to be strongly held. Again, the cliff-mass behind loses not a little of its vagueness on careful

inspection, and, with the aid of one of the new extra-special armour-piercing field-glasses, resolves itself into numerous alarmingly well-defined salients and buttresses, all covered with huge boulders—better cover by far than unentrenched Boers have any right to expect. The left of the mass—that is to say, the side abutting on the nek itself—is precipitous, and therefore unassailable by any one from the road below. Carrying the eye over the width of the nek to the wooded bluff to its left, things here, too, are not quite what they seemed to be at first. The bluff is also precipitous on its inner or nek side, the beetling crest actually overhanging the base in parts. The tiny kopjes, too, at its base are not tiny at all, but of respectable tonnage; nor do they "nestle" in any peaceful fashion against the breast of their great green mother behind, but are separated from her by a deep hollow with unlimited potentialities of Dutchmen in its depths. Such is the scenery which backs the great grassy stage in front of all, which, at the place where the footlights would come, is divided from the auditorium, the gun-plateau, by a wide, deep, but dry watercourse, from us down to which, and from which up to the crest of the nek (oh, the gymnastics of the English language!) and the vanishing-point

of the road, the smooth veldt runs in one gentle uniform slope, called by scientific soldiers "glacis," but by warriors who have to make their difficult way over it under fire, by a far less refined and more English term.

Undoubtedly a strong position, possibly a murderous one, if strongly held against a frontal attack: and it is difficult to see how Moltke himself could devise a "way round" when the ground on either flank, so far from becoming more practicable, only gets, if anything, "more so" than the coveted nek itself.

The luncheon interval is brief; for the Royal Artillery it is no interval at all, but a period of rumbling and rolling into line on either side of the naval guns, howitzers on the left under Major Gordon, 7th and 64th field-batteries under Major Paget on the right of the howitzers: all old campaigners, these gunners, with hardly a wheel of their plaything not pock-marked with bullets or shrapnel from the terrible contests in the dark dawn of the war. A pom-pom, one of two owned by us, on the left of the howitzers: on the extreme right a battery of Royal Horse Artillery, thrown back at right angles, facing the mountains which curve around our right flank. This battery was first engaged, opening with

shrapnel about 1 P.M. on a rift in the hills in front of them, from which several Boers were seen to leave hurriedly. But Boers can fire shrapnel too! Whiz—bang! "What is that?" ask the new chums—a small minority in this army of veterans. "High-velocity gun," laconically reply the seasoned majority. So it is, fired from Heaven knows where, but very obviously slating the gallant horse artillerymen. Half-a-dozen shells in quick succession follow the first, all there or thereabouts. Then a roar from our main artillery position. A 4·7 gun has spoken, and let no other dog bark when that mighty voice is heard! Another roar, and another, then a tornado of them; the sailors have joined battle. Farther on the left the "ough," "ough" of the field-guns breaks upon the ear, distinctly heard amidst the deep booming of the navals, by reason of the different key in which their song is pitched. Farther still the quaint cough of the howitzers just beginning their deadly underhand bowling at the silent and invisible batsmen ahead. What are they all firing at?

From my position on the left of the whole line of guns—to all of which I was blandly informed by a staff officer that I was to consider myself and company as escort—the effect

of every shell, lyddite, shrapnel, and howitzer, was plainly visible. And, as the usually unimpressionable Baron Reuter truly remarks, "a magnificent sight" it was! The main column of fire was at first directed on to the conical kopje to the right of the nek, and what hell it must have been to the Boers crouching on it! Great columns of brown earth, huge fragments of stone showing up, jagged and black even at this distance; square yards of hillside over which the shrapnel bullets whiffed like a mighty besom, sweeping sand and shale in a dusty heap before them,—how could that kopje show plainer the tortures it was enduring? But still the high-velocity demon was spitting his 3-inch "rushers" on to the plateau from his unseen lair, making uncommonly good practice too, and causing one to reflect with impatience on the aphorism — thoroughly disbelieved at the time — laid down by an instructor of Sandhurst days, — that a gun well served and well hidden has nothing to fear from superior metal groping for it in the open. At last, too, is heard what every one has been unconsciously listening for—the savage thumping from a pom-pom from behind the shell-stricken kopje. Piff, piff, piff, skip the little projectiles amongst the naval guns. The

rascal is bearding the very lion himself, and with effect! For a time it was uncommonly uncomfortable on the big-gun deck. "What a lark," quoth the bold mariners, "if we have to shift for a 1-inch spitfire!" But if Boers can fire shrapnel, Britons can pom-pom with the best, and it was not long before Captain Harvest was thumping away, too, from his position on the left, cheerfully sprinkling the nek and its belongings with spurts of dust and smoke for lack of anything more definite to aim at.

Meanwhile, behind this appalling noise and pother, the infantry were unconcernedly ranging themselves in battle array: Dorsets and Middlesex (famous old corps, with famous old *sobriquets*, "Green Linnets" and "Die-Hards," won in opposite corners of the globe) in the front line of the 10th brigade; East Surreys and Queen's (*not* "West Surreys," as ignorant reporters love to call them) leading the 2nd brigade, backed by the West Yorks and Devons, which latter regiment was subsequently diverted from a direct advance for another purpose, to be described later. About 2 P.M. the advance commenced, heralded by a fresh, and if possible more tremendous, blast from the artillery, whose thundering had

diminished for a space, and also by the appearance of two more pom-poms in the enemy's *répertoire*, whose punching was again directed chiefly at our centre, the naval artillery position, once or twice, indeed, landing perilously near the "mark" in the shape of General Buller and his staff, who had ridden up close behind the leading lines of infantry. The early portion of the attack was without incident. The long wavy streaks of men—broken here and there to avoid bad ground, or where a soldier slower of foot than his fellows had failed to keep the alignment—swept steadily forward, topped the plateau, rolled past the guns, and had reached the dry spruit at its base before the first rifle-shot snapped from the heights above. It came from the conical kopje on the right, and was fired at the Dorsets, who were heading straight for the hill, with the Middlesex trending round to envelop the right side of the now battered cone. It was immediately followed by that continuous roar of musketry which the Natal army knows so well. There is nothing to which one can compare the sound of sustained Boer rifle-fire. A policeman's rattle, or a boy drawing his stick along the area railings of an invalid's house, will, no doubt, remind us in the future of Mausers in action, but it will be but a

faint reminiscence, and will be required to be multiplied and hurried up, and generally intensified beyond the power of urchin or policeman, before it can claim to be in the least a phonographic copy of that querulous and ominous crackling. Dorsets and Middlesex are catching it hot, not only from their front, but also from the bluff on the left of the nek, which in this early stage of the fight is rather unfairly neglecting its properly appointed target, the Queen's and Surreys, who press forward rapidly as though impatient to be dealt out their share of the punishment. They had not long to wait, and were soon receiving "a little bit off the top" of the heights on both sides. But the conical kopje is obviously the key of the position, and naturally the Boers, who have as keen an eye for a topographical "key" as any tactical examination board, pour their heaviest fire upon the troops assaulting it.

Situation at 3 P.M., both flanks of the attack well committed, bluffing their several ways uphill against a rapid and continuous fall of bullets. Strength of hostile riflemen guessed by the volume of fire at about 3000 men. Their artillery strength now known to be one 3-inch high-velocity gun (12-pounder) and three pom-poms, all of whose positions were so far uncertain. Not

such a great disparity in chances as the figures would lead a theorist to suppose. Four hidden guns, served by accurate and plucky gunners, and 3000 absolutely invisible and brave riflemen, perched on precipitous and boulder-strewn heights, can do a good deal of damage to an enemy advancing over ground as green and bare as a billiard-table, and it is more than possible that the stout Zoutpansbergers and other occupiers of cliff and kopje had greater hopes of doing damage than of ultimate victory. Yet there was much to gain from victory. A check to the Rooineks at Almond's Nek would confirm the big commandos in their position between Majuba and Pougwana, and would furthermore give time for reinforcements to reach the threatened right. A little digging, another gun or two, 2000 more Mausers, would make Almond's Nek a very difficult nut to crack indeed, and might even send the English back to the by no means secure heights of Botha's Pass, to ruminate on another line of advance. But there had been no time for digging; the bulk of the guns and Mausers were still facing the 4th brigade on the Ingogo, and the bright sun of this day was a sun of Austerlitz to these uncouth kinsmen of the fighting men who had melted away before Napoleon a hundred years before.

About this time two discoveries were made—one, a menace to ourselves; the other, a disaster to the enemy. The first was, that there was something very much more than a commando hanging about Brocklehurst's left flank, though the full gravity of the situation on that side was not, I believe, known at the time. Later information shows that the redoubtable De Wet himself was watching the battle from a no greater distance than two miles outside the outermost cavalry flankers. At any rate, this left flank, open as it was to an attack which would have been disastrous to our artillery position on the plateau, required watching, and half the Devon regiment, with a pom-pom, was despatched to occupy a dangerous ridge about 2000 yards away.

The second discovery was made by a 15-pounder field-gun, which in the course of a so to speak "conchological" tour of the enemy's position burst a shrapnel exactly over the centre of the two deceptive little kopjes in front of the wooded cliff on the left, and, incidentally, exactly upon the high-velocity gun ensconced behind them! A great shot, the result of which apparently escaped the notice of even the artillerymen themselves, though I saw it most distinctly. That 3-inch gun fired no more from

this place. Indeed its only further contributions to the engagement were two futile shots, sent from an invisible position a long way back about an hour later, when the nek was practically in our hands. After this the howitzers began to turn their attention to these kopjes, and then the terrible power of their high-angle fire became apparent. Between the kopjes and the bluff ran a deep and narrow gorge from which an annoying rifle fire proceeded even after the gun had been withdrawn. Time after time the lyddite shells, snorting slowly through the air like a goods train up a gradient, dropped plumb into this huge natural shelter-trench, with a reverberating roar that was awful to hear even from the howitzer position itself. There is no more accurate weapon than a howitzer, in capable hands, at 2500 yards, and no howitzers in the world could be better served than those which coughed and thundered at the unhappy Dutchmen on Almond's Nek. Meanwhile, gallant deeds were in progress on the right flank. Nothing more dashing than the rush of the Dorsets upon the conical hill in front of them has been witnessed in this campaign. "They had been unlucky up to this," wrote the old warrior who watched them, "but have showed themselves as good as any of the others." No

scant praise from one who has followed the army of Natal from its first footsteps on the bloody path of war; how much more prized from the silent man who has led them along it, blaming seldom, praising not often, even where praise has been earned, but somehow letting every private soldier in his command know how truly he gauged and appreciated their efforts, how the very soul and spirit of their fighting had touched his own fighting soul!

Fighting is a great leveller, especially unsuccessful fighting. Else why should Thomas Atkins have looked up so stealthily under his brows into the set face of his general as he made his painful way back from certain hills and ridges of cursed memory? Usually generals are negligible quantities in the soldier's philosophy, but common purpose checked and rebuffed, common dangers, common heroism, can wipe out whole furlongs of the Army List, until the Alpha and Omega thereof are as close together as they are separated in the piping times of peace and prosperity.

And now the Dorsets were earning praise. How they swarmed up that triangular kopje, with every Mauser pumping lead at them in front, and every dry throat behind them inaudibly shouting "Well done!" The Middlesex,

too, were as busy and as brave farther around the right. At 3 P.M. the kopje was ours, and in an incredibly short time bayonets were seen wavering upon the razor-backed ridge behind it. A sudden and dreadful doubt sends a hot wave over the spectator's body, when shells are seen bursting so close above the tiny figures that they actually duck and bob as if to avoid them. Have our gunners 2000 yards away seen them? But it is all right, though no doubt the gallant stormers think that their naval friends are cutting it a bit fine. Whatever they think, it does not appear to paralyse action, for on they go for the cliff behind, moving the faster as the Mauser fire dwindles and dies before them. The Boers are flying, the terrible splashing of Major Paget's shrapnel lending wings to the feet of those whom it does not dash lifeless to the ground. The howitzers cease firing. The heavy naval ordnance begin to cock their long snouts higher and higher into the air, as they "chance it" over the reverse slope of the enemy's late position. The hitherto impartial pom-pom begins to be fastidious, and only turns on its terrifying little hose when agitated dots in the distance show themselves to be indubitably Boers. Even the shrapnel ceases after a time,

except on the far-away right, where the horse-artillery are still shelling away at the mountains. The heights are ours, the seizure of the left following as a natural corollary to success on the right; and the rows of trenches and other terrors on Laing's Nek are worth no more than a box of pins.

It is easy to wax sentimental over the silence that follows a battle. It has been done before: alas! unless human nature alters very much, it will be done again. As my men and I marched wearily down into the mist that rose from the spruit-bed, following the guns which had been our charge all day, to bed in the darkening valley, I wondered if the slain who lay hidden amongst the boulders were raising their pale faces a little to listen, like the corpses in Fritel's dreadful picture.[1]

But after all, the day ended, as it had begun, in cheerfulness. Sidelong glances at the tops of kopjes in the gloom, and dismal reflections upon their ghastly occupants, soon became out of place by a bivouac fire, and in the presence of a good dinner, for which relief I here register much and fervent thanks to the gallant and hospitable pom-pom officers who afforded it.

[1] The Conquerors.

X.

THE END OF THE NATAL CAMPAIGN.

And so ended the Natal campaign, as vital in its issues as any ever fought by the British army. Had the worst happened — had Ladysmith fallen, had the Boer hordes overrun, as they bade fair to do, the southern portion of the colony—five years' war would not have cleared it, and British prestige would have received a blow more severe than would have resulted from any defeat by Napoleon, or the Russians in the Crimea. But the little forces at Mooi River and Estcourt had stemmed the flood in November 1899; with tremendous toil and suffering the army had thrust it painfully back, damming it where it could not make headway, until now, after eight terrible months, the Queen's dominions were finally reclaimed, and a weight of anxiety, not unmixed with shame, lifted from millions of British hearts. On the 13th June the army marched through Volksrust,

its first Transvaal town, hearing from pale-faced women how Chris. Botha's defeated commandos had hurried through it the day before, trundling with them the big cannon from Pougwana and many lesser ones. Laing's Nek was clear, and General Clery, moving over it, joined the rest of the forces at Charlestown. On the 16th General Hildyard with the 11th brigade made an excursion to Wakkerstroom, receiving its formal surrender, rejoining General Buller at Zandspruit on the 20th. A good deal of joy was wasted over that surrender; we did not know then that submission is to the dishonourable Dutch but a new reading of Canning's old squib: giving too little—their plighted word; asking too much—to be believed. And now in response to urgent messages from Lord Roberts, who had occupied Heidelberg, all haste was made across a magnificent plateau of grass to Standerton, which was reached without opposition on June 24. Thereafter the Natal army exists no more, though it was not officially broken up until October. After its fitful fever, during which but for the splendid strength of its constitution it had surely been very nigh to dissolution, it subsided to sleep upon the railway line, strung out from Natal to Greylingstadt, here a post, there a post, harassed continually by marauding bands, slumbering like a great tired dog

with one eye open. Columns innumerable were found from it; no restless detachment, however apparently hopelessly "marooned," but found itself at one time or another on the march again, part of some dangerous little "side-show" or other. The history of these lines of communication will form an astonishingly thick, varied, and absorbing volume, and the casualty list will only be small because of the appalling ones which have closed other narratives.

And so the Natal army still wakefully sleeps (July 1901). Much has happened since its disintegration—a hundred battles, a thousand skirmishes, a myriad hopes shattered or kept feverishly living on as hopes, to be the soul of every little blockhouse and post along the South African railroads. And in every one held by the men of Buller's old army dwells with Hope, the twin soul of Memory, the memory of a great danger, and how Tom, Dick, and Harry, now existing within this very rectangle of sandbags, were called upon to face and avert it. After this campaign there must be no need to recall to Englishmen the old verse :—

"The brave poor sodger ne'er despise,
Nor count him as a stranger;
Remember, he's his country's stay
In day and hour of danger."

XI.

MAROONED.

Not spurned from some lawless or indignant ship's company on to a lonely islet, but dropped at a little dot of a wayside station on the great green veldt-sea, to guard with half a hundred men a stretch of railway line. Veldt to the right of us, veldt to the left of us, before and behind us in long lazy waves of ground, limitless, melancholy, almost terrifying in its interminable sameness. One feels like an ant at the bottom of a teacup, so round and unattainable appears the horizon, so discouragingly similar the prospect on every side. The little station, with its brave air of business, its stationmaster, and its electric "buzzer," examples of the cheerful in animate and inanimate, its signals which wag at the approach of the infrequent trains as conscientiously and decisively as if they controlled the traffic outside Waterloo Station,—all this only accentuates the surrounding silence and solitude.

Walk a quarter of a mile away and its small bustle becomes isolated, and reminds one of the tinkling of the time-bell from an unseen ship at night upon the ocean. Even the half hundred British soldiers seem subdued, and detract not a whit from the sense of the vast loneliness of the primeval meadow. They are not really subdued, of course; Tommy, alone upon the summit of Aconcagua, would comfort his soul and break the detestable silence with song or one of those apostrophes to his surroundings, which to my mind plainly indicate a latent pantheism in our rank and file. But here in this tiny camp at the bottom of the gigantic bowl of grass, songs and apostrophes, even games of football, are but the tinkling ship's bell again, far away, drowned in the tremendous quiet, almost sad.

Now we, half hundred and the writer, are, if you please, a fibre of that important military muscle known as the lines of communication. What tomes have been written upon this vital portion of an army in the field; what elegant diagrams, resembling the new-fashioned jewelled muff-chains, with little "blobs" joined one to the other by a thin line indicating the various posts and their connections, adorn the text-books for the edification of young gentlemen required to evince by examination an intimate acquaint-

ance with the whole chain, though they will probably never have to command anything more than one of the "blobs." If one could peer into the mighty mind of a general setting forth to conquer, what would we see? Triumphant tactical combinations? Deceptive retirements? "Slim" sidlings to a flank? Not a bit of it. Across that gigantic intellect would be written but three words, a label upon a troubled packet of nerves, "Lines of communication"! Thereby we, the said half hundred and writer, derive no small comfort. When first we were delegated to this task there was but one bitter and rebellious verdict, none the less to the point because it was that pitiable modern a Yankeeism, the monosyllable "left," to wit—an expression which may be better understood by the classical reader unversed in the latter-day volapuk of slang, when he is told that it is telegraphese for the feelings which surged over Atalanta when she looked up from picking the gaud from the cinder-path to see the outsider making his effort inside the distance amid a roar from the ring! We trust we have made it clear to the classical reader!

This campaign has been peculiar in many ways, in every way if the classics of the pursuit are to be taken as guides for all war. Even its broad

initial conception and plan were unique—if I were a civilian I should say faulty, but at any rate unique. Everything in it, from the effect of shrapnel to the working of the hospital system, has been a surprise, and therefore instructive. It has been as though the blood-bought military lessons of the last forty years have been for naught; nothing has occurred as per book, whereas enough things have occurred *not* as per book to make a book themselves. And of these peculiarities hardly anything has been more peculiar than the insecurity of the lines of communication,—I mean, their momentary liability to be interrupted, or even destroyed. Of course a great deal of this must be attributed to the vagrant nature of the enemy. Cutting railway lines at night is loafer's work, and the Boer set free from the discipline of the commando is a loafer of loafers, though, it is true, a living oxymoron in his activity and resource in the loafing game. Small commandos are but aggregations of loafers with increased powers, so that they can not only cut a line but perhaps demolish a defended post or two, or at least absorb a few of the patrols which link them precariously together. Against *big* commandos the vagrancy charge cannot be fairly urged.

We have elsewhere[1] done the Boer full justice as a fighting man, and deplored the entomological quizzing of him by that British speciality, the man in the street, through his magnifying-glass, the daily papers. A commando 1000 strong is as respectable a fighting unit as any regiment in the world. It has its weaknesses, of course, but "hanging about" is not one of them; it must rather be said to "move," and with effect at times. But to the small commandos, say of from 50 to 300 men, "hanging about" is the beginning and the end of logistics, and very much abhorred they are by the isolated guardians of railway and telegraph. "Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike," they as often as not take up their abode on a kopje within perhaps an hour's ride of a garrisoned railway-station or fortified bridge, and from there put into play an ingenious and exasperating policy of pin-pricks. They are peculiar to the lines of communication, and their composition is as peculiar as their field of activity. Often they are the relics of the local commando, whose main body has surrendered and returned to its normal avocations of ploughing and peculation. This is the

[1] *Vide* p. 265.

nucleus, and around it hovers a hazy unclassified fringe of society in the shape of oath-breakers or felons from other districts, who are afraid of serious fighting, are more afraid of being recognised if they surrender, and who therefore seek a dubious safety *in medio*. With a few unhappy souls recaptured from their farms and forced at the rifle-muzzle to ride out again to the hated kopjes the *olla-podrida* is probably complete, and one can pretty well imagine how, weary, shiftless, and mutually distrustful, its component Dutchmen sit upon their kopje and gaze miserably over towards the little cluster of tents which shelter the dominant Power they can never make faces at again.

Thus it is at the little post from which this screed is penned. We have our neighbouring kopje, and upon it our small commando. To be exact, we have two neighbouring kopjes, and the small commando is as often as not performing the venerable feat of "one Turk becoming two Turks" by sitting upon them both. Down on the veldt around them and us there dwells a scattered colony of perhaps 150 surrendered Burghers, covering roughly ten square miles of country; here and there a little cluster of farms —usually the property of less important farmers

—nestling comfortably in the basin of the veldt; here and there a solitary farmhouse with its cool creeper-clad *stoep*, and its shady grove of acacia-trees, the demesne of some "warm" citizen, sufficiently independent to be able to live as all Boers secretly desire to live—alone, unseen, and unseeing. It is through this colony of peaceful repentants that the small commando, existing sourly upon its kopjes, strikes at the hated Briton, and very shrewd and insidious the blows are, when the mutual relations of the *dramatis personæ* are considered. The surrendered farmers are now the *protégés* of the dominant Power up at the railway-station; grandiloquent promises of protection are nailed upon every front door, pats upon the back and comfortable statements are their daily pabulum —all is now safe, because the new Power is dominant and intends to "hold any one responsible" who dares to call it into question! But alack for the *protégés*, the dominant Power in this particular spot, as in too many others, is represented by but fifty foot-soldiers chained to the railway line, and as unable to prowl over the ten square miles of repentance as if they were still in the haven where they so devoutly would be — Southampton. So it is that accursed small commando which does the prowl-

ing, paying midnight visits to all the homesteads, looting horses, cattle, valuables and necessaries, often robbing the great protector itself of one of its *protégés* by dragging an unhappy Burgher from his bed to assist in the uncomfortable seance on the kopje, to be hated and suspected by his comrades and henceforth a thing proscribed, Boer and Briton his enemies alike. It is terribly hard lines. When such unfortunates are recaptured by the invaders, as they assuredly will be, even Solomon in all his glory would be hard put to it to decide whether they have been spirited away by force or by evil and treacherous inclination. No doubt many a cruel injustice will be the result, and many a foolish act of leniency; but he who can indicate the path of justice through the maze will deserve so well of his country, that a free and speedy passage home must be the least of his rewards. It is, of course, our system that is wrong; that of the small commando is correct enough, and works to admiration. The surrender of no Dutchman to whom we were not prepared to afford actual and adequate protection should have been accepted; but if Burghers insisted on surrendering they should have been kept under the eyes of a strong and mobile garrison, ready to avenge at once any

attempt at discrediting the plighted word of the proclamations. As it is, we have done nothing more for them than relieve them of their rifles, and is it to be wondered at that the harried farmers occasionally take the most comfortable of the two courses open to them, and prefer to enjoy actual personal safety rather than an immunity which exists only in the ill-printed proclamation upon their violated front doors?

When this post was first handed over to us for occupation the small commando was a big and dignified one, and hovered like a thunder-cloud upon the hills about seven miles to the southward. Those were brisk times upon the railway; never a day but some train was derailed, or a post attacked, or a reconnoitring patrol chased merrily back to camp with a horse or two wounded, or sometimes, alas! with a message for the ambulance. Every day the trains bustled up and down like frightened gossips with stirring tales for eager ears at every way-side station. Some of these little incidents were productive of much gallantry, all of much talk and pother amongst the lines of communication. The Dublin Fusiliers, already with a full cargo of glory won in Natal, could not of course allow so splendid a chance of a fight as that afforded

by the guardianship of a station surrounded by kopjes to escape. So they were duly attacked by overwhelming numbers up there at Zuikerbosch, and as a matter of course repulsed the enemy with great slaughter, to the immense credit of Major English and all hands. Lord Strathcona's Horse, too, enjoyed themselves vastly, and surrounded snipers in farm-houses, and got surrounded by snipers themselves with unfailing dash, regularity, and success, doing a great amount of useful, plucky work with small loss. Then Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry (strenuous, hard-bitten, fighting lot that they are, no corps in the British army has taken and given harder blows) took up the running, and whilst cursing their luck at being "left" and split up, managed to keep themselves amused by using their half-dozen detachments to inflict as many annoyances daily upon the ubiquitous Dutchmen. Once indeed they were the actors in a little tragedy, up on the shoulder of glum, round-backed Rooikopji. Even Thorneycroft's, used as they are to "doing a man's work with a boy," cannot expect to storm a hundred Boer marksmen off a precipice with a mere patrol, and back they had to come, leaving four killed upon the hillside and their gallant and accomplished captain severely wounded. Then the

writer's little post had its turn—a very mild one, but still a turn, especially for the Boers. One still dark night a small party of the latter, perhaps thirty in number, all unaware of the dominant Power sleeping wakefully at one of their favourite level crossings, attempted to ride over the line for purpose unknown, and in their ignorance almost walked over a sentry peering out over a sunken trench. Bang! bang! bang! said the sentry—remarks repeated by a brother sentry a few yards away. Terror and amaze amongst the prowlers, who gallop for the crossing, to fall "in hideous ruin" over that ancient and honourable device, a slack wire hung with tin pots. A crashing volley from the garden wall completes the rout; away they gallop again, *quadrupedante putrem*, with an agitated thudding of ponies' hoofs over the grass, past another sentry who exclaims rapidly to the full extent of his magazine at the receding sound. Brother Boer must find another crossing, a task unfortunately only too easy, unless his nerves have sustained too great a shock to allow him to attempt it. Yes, we on the lines of communication are doubtless "left," but we have our consolations, thanks to the commando over there on the ridge.

But all is not well with that commando. One

day a Cape cart is seen approaching over the veldt like a fat black snail, with a little white parallelogram upon its shell. A white flag, by the gods! On it comes, hesitatingly and apologetically, and is "held up" by two men of our guard who go forth to meet it. It is a Burgher coming in from the kopje to surrender, Mauser and bandolier complete, evidently in a great stew as to the treatment to be expected at the hands of the dominant Power. But alarm soon subsides when the programme is explained: he must first take the *eed*, the oath of neutrality, sign his name thereto, then run away and play and be a good boy! He is frankly surprised, and in the fulness of his heart delivers himself of a fluent Dutch period, the English equivalent of which we gather to be that there is more where this came from,—we may expect other Cape carts and white handkerchiefs. He then drives away with the air of a man who has done a good day's work, and a wave of the hand as if to say, "Adieu, dominant Power, you are good and gracious, and extraordinarily convenient, but forgive me privately ruminating upon your slight but undoubted silliness!" But he has not lied, and sure enough next day up come two more Cape carts, with their cargo of Mausers and Dutchmen, named in order of im-

portance. The day following three more, until we have about twenty names on the books. "More than we killed at Colenso!" says the detachment with a gratified smirk. Then comes stupendous news. The field cornet and most of his men have surrendered *en bloc* up at the big camp some miles above us. The big commando exists no longer — well done the lines of communication! All day the Burghers from the other camp trot by our post, one of them refusing to halt in spite of two warning shots fired by a sentry suspicious of the galloping horseman, and not yet informed of the surrender, eventually getting a bullet through his pony as a hint to mend his manners now that he is a British subject. A pardonable mistake —firstly, because of the Boer's own action in galloping the faster at the warning shot instead of halting; secondly, because at this precise moment the unregenerated relics of the commando, now reduced to the status of loafers, are firing upon the Burghers as they troop back to their farms, even chasing the more timorous of them up to our station. A Gilbertian situation, not without its humour, and certainly not devoid of annoyance and shame to the paternal but helpless dominant Power.

During the ensuing week there was a steady

flow of Burghers surrendering at our post, the now small commando was becoming smaller and more loafing and disreputable; then a pause. A proclamation had appeared ordaining with many a "whereas" that henceforth no surrendering Dutchman should be permitted to take the oath and depart, but should be detained as a prisoner of war to be dealt with as that tremendous little "Frederick Sleigh, Baron Roberts of Kandahar and Waterford, K.P., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., V.C., Field-Marshal Commanding in Chief," should direct! It is nothing short of marvellous how instantaneously the utterances of our splendid "Bobs" with his processional titles have penetrated to the uttermost dongas of the enemy! Not a Boer came in whilst that proclamation was in force, with its visions of unknown seas and expatriation unbearable. Then a counter-order, decreeing three days of grace before the enforcement of the ukase. Twenty Boers came in that day to our post alone, and a few more on each of the remaining days, bringing our "bag" up to sixty-five. "More than we have ever seen dead," chuckles the detachment, eyeing the little clumps of dingy careworn men who congregate daily in front of our main trench. There is something intensely fascinating about

them! This one lay in the river-bed at Colenso, and is able to tell the very men who had rushed to attack it (*infandum renovare dolorem!*) how they looked from the other side. Another formed one of the party who hung on to the shell-stricken razor-back of Vaal Krantz; another had crouched all day thirty yards from British rifles on the bloody summit of Spion Kop; another had seen his townsfolk blasted and charged from off the face of Pieter's Hill. They are all fighting Boers in this district, the commando from which they come has been as ubiquitous as the battalion to which they surrender, and very battered and war-worn are the Mausers they hand in. A noticeable feature about them is their extreme modesty and reticence with regard to their fighting experiences. It is the hardest thing in the world to "draw" a Boer into a description of his share in an action, but once "drawn" no map could show more faithfully than his memory the disposition of his own and the enemy's forces on the day in question. Long years of unconscious working out of topographical problems in pursuit of buck and black men have made his mind as wax to retain impressions of the "lie" of valleys and spurs. As he talks in his jerky rumble, fit clothing for the atrocious *taal*, with

the toe of his boot or the end of his sjambok he will scratch you out in the dust a rough plan of the operations under discussion such as the most accomplished of Staff College draughtsmen, with dainty sketching-case and chalks of many colours, could not beat for clearness and accuracy. But, as I say, he will talk but rarely. After his first official visit he comes daily up to our post—not for reminiscences and gossip, but for flour and sugar, and above all for a "pass": a "pass" to go and visit his grandmother, to fetch a plough from a neighbour's farm, to drive his sheep in from the spruit across the railway, to look for a strayed horse. In fact, what with his "passes" and his persistent patronage of the little food depot presided over by a non-commissioned officer for his benefit, he is almost more of a nuisance as a peaceful fellow-subject than he was when flitting about the kopje Mauser in hand: when jokingly told as much, he responds with his melancholy smile, and asks the price of jam! It is amusing to watch the relations that soon spring up between the colony of dependent Burghers and the sergeant in charge of their food depot. The latter is a little bustling man, smart and prompt in all his actions, and quite intolerant of people who "hang about" and waste time. One is irre-

sistibly reminded of a relieving officer fussing over a batch of timid paupers as one watches him taking the orders of a number of big leisurely Boers, who exasperate him with their indecision and slowness. How he smacks down the change into their huge palms, and wheels the multifarious parcels into line before them with as much clatter as if the rectangle of sugar or coffee were a squad of backward recruits! Hear his admonition—three parts English, one part dialected dialect—when a big Dutchman, after brooding over his purchases for some moments, solemnly intimates that he thinks he will yet require something else. The Boers have been called keen bargainers. It is difficult to believe it of them, given as they are to absent-mindedness and long musings. I have spoken before of the melancholy of the veldt: it is apparent in every line of their quiet, furrowed faces, with the deep-set eyes drawn sadly down at the outer angles, and the grave mouths under the aquiline noses. Whence did the Boers get those wonderful noses? "All the blood of all the Howards" could not produce a more dignified proboscis than adorns the countenance of many a Boer. To the artist in search of a model for grand old age the Transvaal farms would be a paradise: every other one would

give him a Moses or a Ugolino in the father of the family, and many a yellow-bearded Siegfried amongst the sons. The genuine Boers are undoubtedly a handsome race, and, after all, their big bodies only carry out a natural law in so often giving houseroom to the pettiest of intellects. We leave it to students of ethnology to determine how long it will take us to convert a nation of foolish giants into quick-witted "ordinaries"—a process for which civilisation is somewhat famous or infamous.

All this is apparently exasperating beyond measure to the small commando upon the kopje. Their depredations become more frequent: never a night but an outlying farmer loses some of his best horses and cattle,—he himself, if in luck, escaping by a back-door, or sometimes being seized and carried away to the laager. The unhappy men take to sleeping out on the veldt, and wonder very much what they have gained by surrendering as they get up in the dim dawn from their uncomfortable couch amongst the rocks to see a string of cattle—their cattle—disappearing over the skyline driven by dark, squat-hatted figures on horseback. One day a party of the irreconcilable swoop upon the line in broad daylight, "snipe" briskly at a party working at the telegraph wires, and carry off a harmless

platelayer from his daily task as a hawk snatches up a field-mouse. The subsequent history of the platelayer is so amusing that no excuse is offered for its relation here. At the moment of his abduction the unfortunate man was, in the pride of his heart, making his usual round mounted, a fact which appears to have deluded his captors into believing him to be a person of importance. He was unable to undeceive them until they had conveyed him to a township some thirty miles distant, which was on the point of being occupied by General Buller and his column on the march northward. On the summons to surrender who should come forth to hand over the keys and other municipal belongings to the invader but this very platelayer! The Boers had fled, together with all the local authorities, leaving their prisoner to fulfil the duties of mayor and commandant and garrison all in one,—surely the most bizarre combination of *rôles* that ever fell to the lot of any man of "fishplates" and "Jim Crows" since the world began!

With Buller and his abominable big guns in the neighbourhood the raiders are quiet for a time, but when he has disappeared to the northward on his way to some of the hardest fighting of the whole campaign, things get lively again around us, and the dominant Power has to con-

fess once more its incapacity to deal with the protean difficulties of a "pacified" district. Mobile columns of irreproachable composition and incredible immobility creep up one side of the line and down the other—"circular tours" the irreverent call them. The Boers do not call them anything in particular, but disperse at their approach and coagulate in rear of them when they have passed with ludicrous regularity. From our little eyrie we can see those columns come and go, and mighty pretty they look with their yellow cubes of steadily marching infantry, and the twinkling legs of the battery horses over the smooth veldt. But unfortunately all this is but "eyewash"; the infantry might as well stay in their tents and the horses in their lines for all the good they are going to do. It is useless employing a regular remedy for an abnormal disease, and when the stately little pageant has passed, with its staff and its guns and its two acres of transport, the harassed farmers come flying in more indignant than ever, with bitter words for commandos both Boer and British. They even offer to spoil the spoilers themselves if rifles can be given them for a day or two, but that would be highly irregular and therefore out of the question.

In the meantime alarming little telegrams are

keeping the half hundred reminded that they *are* but half a hundred and far away from any support; also that De Wet, prince of raiders, is still uncaught though Paget, Broadwood, Rundle, and half-a-dozen other generals have been whirling about after him in a manner so utterly bewildering that even the experienced old lady of Printing House Square throws up her mittened hands in despair when she is told for the twentieth time that "the cordon is now complete." "Seventeen hundred Boers with five guns are approaching you from the south," buzzes the wire one evening. Then a few moments later, "Guns with party south of you not five, but eight, with three pom-poms." Let us be accurate at any cost! Even the date and the time of the onslaught are communicated to us anon, and we cudgel our brains for a message of suitable scorn and pithiness with which to answer the apparently inevitable summons to surrender. But the day and night indicated pass undisturbed, and we turn out on to the windy little platform in the grey of dawn uncertain whether to feel sold or saved. A few days later the unabashed wire repeats the warning. This time there appears to be more in it, for we see several largish bodies of the enemy moving along the ridges to the southward.

Suddenly one of their patrols, about thirty strong, appears close to the line about two miles below us. A section is hastily equipped and despatched to observe them. The Boers, who had just commenced to "snipe" at a party of coolies working on the ballast, turn and gallop off as the infantry show up on the rise above them, but a black scout on their left flank is captured and brought back to the station. Another uneasy but uneventful night, every man sleeping with his equipment on and his rifle at his side. After this the wires become more moderate, though still menacing. Now it is 400, now 600 with three guns, now a "considerable force," now an "unknown number"; but always Boers, north, south, east, and west of us, and always heading for our scanty and unimportant selves! We grow callous, then derisive—"Let 'em *all* come!" jeers the detachment, but, like Mariana, they gaze out over the loopholed moat for that which cometh not. All the same, the wires have not been infected with the national complaint, lying,—the Boers are there sure enough. Every day we see them on the high ground above the distant river, in tens, and twenties, and fifties, but only once in hundreds. That was when heavy firing on Rooikopji drew every Boer lurking by every

drift towards the spot, what time a handful of mounted infantry were attempting to oust seven times their numbers from that natural stronghold, as already related.

All this time there is tremendously hard hitting going on up there by Machadodorp, and we are feeling more "left" than ever, although the defeat after defeat inflicted on Louis Botha's stubborn remnant actually increases the need for watchfulness down below on the lines of communication. Little gangs of Boers, unable to stand Buller's hammering, are breaking back down country again, and in the very worst of tempers. One such gang establishes itself at a farm within four miles of us, and does as much looting in a week as a British army corps is guilty of in a year. Result as before, the daily arrival of refugees and a great stultification of the dominant Power. One unfortunate Burgher attempts to do with his bare fists what the British army with all its thunderings cannot do. In an access of despair he one day "goes for" the robbers, and, marvellous to relate, escapes with nothing worse than a black eye, which he duly brings to us with the rest of his budget of woe. Unfortunately it is the only item of it we can cure.

At last comes some real excitement, over the wires as usual. Ex-President Steyn, despairing of the Republic, has left the faithful and fated up north to shift for themselves, and is seeking to recross the railway to gain his Free State dominion, for ever lost, for O. V. S. has become O. R. C., and 10,000 Steyns will not avail to change the style and title again. Still, the big, bearded man is going to try, and this very night, and we are to catch him at one of the many level crossings. Our little force suffices to watch but three, and they are duly watched throughout a long moonless night. Perhaps the outlawed man had warning of the lonely little groups crouching and listening at intervals along the silent veldt railroad. At any rate he, too, came not, neither by one of our three crossings nor at any of those between us and Paarde Kop fifty miles below. Another false alarm, and the oft-deceived detachment is beginning to give way to despair and utter boredom, when like a bolt from the blue comes something definite at last over those ridiculous wires. "Come in at once to join a column setting out to-morrow!" By the piper that played before Moses, they have marked down 2000 Boers in the hilly country to the westward, with x guns (the wires are

getting guarded in their estimates of guns!), and we are to sally out against them, horse, foot, and artillery, with "Bloody Mary"[1] complete. Long live the lines of communication and the "pacified districts"! Hurry up the relieving detachment and let us be off: we are marooned no longer!

[1] The universal *sobriquet* of the 5-inch gun.

XII.

A SIDE-SHOW.

THERE is unusual animation this windy May morning at a fusty, dusty little camp squatting, like a mushroom clump, alongside the railway on the high veldt. A train or two stand in the red-roofed station, nodulous and spiky looking trains, with mysterious things bulging beneath tarpaulins, and red-nosed men, pierced with the cold of an early journey, clinging to the bulges, or lying so intermingled with wheels, boxes, waggon-shafts, and other indefinite lumber, that a person unused to supply-trains and their inhabitants would risk a little currency on their never being able to extricate themselves. Over the high sides of two or three trucks protrude the grave, inquiring faces of horses, their pointed ears turning in a thousand directions in half as many seconds, as people dash about noisily on the little plat-

form, lifting and dropping wooden cases, shouting to friends or assistants within a few feet of them, losing their own things and finding the things of others in the way that people on platforms have done ever since such places have existed to render a habitable globe less habitable. Here and there lie heaps of "kit," encyclopædic word, embracing coats, helmets, Gordian knots of straps, the green squashy cyclinders of officers' valises, even slain poultry and raw rations, tied with string, perhaps, to a pair of boots or the stock of a rifle. The secret is out — a column is in process of formation, and the dusty little camp is being fed from the base thirty miles away by means of this noisy station, like a patient through a cannula. The noise increases; down with a clang fall the iron sides of the trucks on the leading train. Some of the red-nosed men are unlacing the tarpaulins, which, released, flap and crack in the wind like the mainsail of a twenty tonner. Off they come, and lo! beneath squat ugly khaki guns, nozzles upwards, as if yawning at being rudely awaked, three on a truck: what potentialities that truck bears this day!

One can never look at a gun at rest without saying to oneself "When?" or at a gun

in the very act of belching its flame-girt horror without ejaculating "Now!" I have heard a whole regiment of onlookers do that in unison. There is more than steel and thunder in a cannon; there is that of the uncanny, of which it is impossible to write, which, if written, would excite the derision of the very men who feel it most. We shall never get our column started at this rate. Off come more tarpaulins, beneath them waggons, boxes of biscuits, tins of "bully," water-carts, ammunition-carts, also ambulance-carts, potentialities again of a sort complementary to those of the khaki squatters in the next truck. Then the flaps of the horse-trucks are thrown down, with more noise than the others if possible, the cargo not being of insensate iron and wood, but of nervous, wide-eyed animals, who start and snort at the offensive clamour. They are then led out, one by one, down the slippery ramp, stepping gingerly, much afraid of man's extraordinary devices. These are the gun horses, and their composure is quickly regained as they are led up to the well-known limbers, which have meantime been shoved and handspiked and blasphemed from their trucks. And so the work goes on, with shoutings, jammed fingers, and profanity until the trains are

cleared, and all the inanimate portions of a column lie like leaves in Vallombrosa upon the platform, waiting to be collected by the myrmidons of the transport officer. The latter stands tranquil, conscious of his power. Confusion soon freezes into order before that cold eye; scattered biscuit boxes, &c., seem to leap together by magic from odd corners of the maze, and together are borne ponderously off, once more the entity which had its birth in some active brain in a distant office,—"three days' rations for Colonel Jones's column."

Meanwhile, in camp, Colonel Jones, king that is to be, is standing at his tent-door watching the fighting portion of his command converging upon him from the four points of the compass. A company is just marching dustily in from Platspruit, ten miles away; another is expected from Zandkop on the other side; a third from Paarde Rand, a hill-top station wide of the line. These, with the three companies, the normal population of the camp, will form his infantry, the backbone of his fighting body. Few enough, in all conscience, but with garrisons at starvation point and "nights in bed" but an algebraic symbol, it is impossible to spare more. On the round green bosom of the veldt, miles away, his keen eye perceives a

square black spot with smaller spots in advance of and around it. These, he knows, are his cavalry on their way to join, — two squadrons of the famous old 25th Dragoons, who so far have had the chance of doing little more with their fine English horses than eat them in beleaguered Ladysmith. The black spots become invisible in an invisible dip, they reappear, bigger and blacker, they will be in soon, and old Jones wonders if old Brown is in command, hoping he is, because he hasn't set eyes on him since, let me see, those jolly days at Bareilly when they two quarrelled complacently over Miss Robinson, the Commissioner's daughter, unwitting that she was already secretly married to young Jenkins of the 150th Bengal Lancers, and afraid to tell her father! Oh, those placid old days, they appear sacred amid the worry and responsibility of these anxious young ones. When will Jehu come flogging along the veldt road shouting joyously, "It is peace!"?

But the camp already possesses cavalry, to wit, 150 men of one of those harum-scarum, dare-devil Colonial corps which have done such fine service throughout the war—jolly, reckless fellows, the courage of all nations, with men in the ranks who have fought in Cuba, in Texas, in

Timbuctoo. A useful lot, thinks Colonel Jones, but somewhat of an anxiety to his sealed-pattern soldier's mind, not sufficiently regardful of keeping touch with plodding infantry, and apt to cover the scenery for miles with the scandalous spectacle of wild horses scampering madly before a brace of yelling troopers—apt also to return to camp, grinning, in the evening with Dutch Lares and Penates, deceased poultry dangling from the saddle "D's."

By sundown all units have been reported in camp, orders are issued for to-morrow's move, and Colonel Jones, as he turns into his blankets, breathes a little prayer, more to Fortune than his God as is the soldier's wont, that chances will be given him to show what manner of man he is. Around the evening camp-fires his orders and he have been discussed, until fatigue and irate orderly sergeants combine to silence every sound but the deep breathing of a thousand sleepers.

Sleep well, oh column! You are but a side-show, no deep-sea cable vibrates with the news of your concentration, the men in the big arena have scarcely time to hear of your sixpenny arrival in the greatest war-show on earth; but here you are all the same, a thousand fighting men, no mean thing in your own perspective, and as prepared to, and as likely to lose your

lives and fall eternally asleep as any amongst the Titans. Sleep well!

'Tis a fine hunting morn, and off goes the hunt at dawn, a chilly dawn, with a mist like the smoke of fine tobacco curling around the grassy hummocks of the veldt, and the air so still that the breath of the horses puffs upwards in little blue jets. Going to be a hot day, say the old hands, for all the tingle is in the air now; the freshmen swing their arms and wish they had put on another jersey. The procession streams anyhow out through the gap in the wire entanglement, from every spike of which hangs a diamond drop of dew and the delicate tracery of a wet spider's web; a company here, a gun there, a mounted officer pushing forward here, another there trying to turn his "bobbery" horse to get back. With a rumble-dumble and metallic jingle the two field guns bump over the sun-baked ruts, and behind them groans a 4·7 naval gun, long of snout, elephantine of carriage and wheels, Jack ashore in every lurch of his rolling gait behind the plodding oxen. Outside the wire a halt is called: there is a forming of infantry, wheeling of artillery and baggage, and a curious process of disintegration amongst the mounted men who are to lead the way. The column is getting

into shape, and in any other war but this a mighty respectable shape it would appear. The cavalry, who have extended on the move, now cover the country in front for three miles, with little clumps on either flank; and seeing this Colonel Jones gives the word, and off again lumbers the whole caravan, due northwards, heading straight for—what?

For a little laager of a hundred Boers, comfortably ensconced in a hollow designed for surprises, says the Intelligence officer; this only as a premise, however—the Intelligence officer has heard his department too often chaffed for being eupeptic in the matter of information to offer it as a conclusion, though his news for weeks past, gesticulated *ore rotundo* by native scouts with rolling eyes and coats of many colours, has been plain enough on this point. The laager is there right enough, its garrison also as reported, a hundred men and no more, but within two hours' ride there lies a town, at present the two hundredth that has done duty as the headquarters of the Boer Government and army, and who knows but that handsome, untruthful Louis Botha, getting wind of our venture, may not descend to the assistance of his outpost, turning our side-show into something more suited to the big arena, no pleasant pros-

pect for performers so modest as we? But possibilities such as these are not for the common ear, and the columnar private soldier, glad to be stepping it out again across the fresh green veldt after his long term of hard labour at patrolling and sentry-going, as guardian of the line, sees ahead of him only ridge after ridge of grass, each with its little puckered eyebrow of stones atop, and the prospect of an immensity of fun when the time for rushing the laager shall arrive. He knows (though he should not) that other columns such as his own are marching from various points, converging upon the self-same laager, and to himself and his pals, with wealth of metaphor and prognostication unlimited, he pictures the doomed Dutchmen therein as scorpions within a ring of flame, as chickens already hatched. Cheery British soldier, this is no place for his eulogy; but who can help admiring his plumb settlement of the uncertain before he wins, his grim certainty that he is winning when he is already beaten! For he has been beaten, has the British soldier, and had he not been, we should have known nothing of his grandest characteristics. And now behold him footing it smartly over the grass, helmet awry to turn the sidelong rays of the two hours' old sun, tobacco smoke and badinage issuing

alternately from his mouth, in one extreme corner of which hangs his short pipe with inverted bowl. Suddenly there is a distant sound ahead, which sends an electric shock through all the lines of marching men. At home in London town we should know well enough what it was,—a boy on the trot drawing his stick along the area railings; but out here we know what it is too, a score of Mausers in action. So ho! The cavalry have drawn them already; precious little surprise there is going to be about this! Some put their pipes away, others, who had not been smoking, pull out and light theirs, and all increase the pace up the rise, until halted by command. From the top one can see—nothing! The hurried click-clack is still audible, apparently coming from a low stone-topped ridge overhanging a farm about two miles ahead, but not a living soul is in sight, Boer or Briton. Then, as from the very ground itself, a galloping rider appears speeding towards us. "Bring up the gun," says Colonel Jones, standing by his horse, telescope to eye; no need to ask "which gun?" the old salt behind the team of bullocks has lurched up the rise and is alongside in no time. "Action front!" Round swings the twenty-foot tube, there is a business-like bustle amongst the

gunners, and "old Nelson" is ready, gaping cavernously, the cynosure of every eye. The horseman dashes up to the colonel, his horse trembling and sweating. "Thirty Boers on that ridge, sir; our men have dismounted in the hollow." "Let drive!" says Jones over his shoulder to the eager youth in charge of the big gun; spruce lord of the thunder, this is a happy moment for thee! The officer runs to his charge, the massive breech opens and shuts with a clang like that of the door of a safe, there is a squinting along the twenty feet of khaki steel, a breathless pause, and then—! No word can picture the catastrophe when heavy ordnance speaks at close quarters. Earth, air, and sky are momentarily no more, every sense is slain, even that of hearing; the very horses do not start and rear as they do at lesser sounds, but stand with trembling legs and distended eyes. But the echoes die away, and only the thin dry shriek of the receding shell is heard high in the air. All glasses are levelled at the ridge, from which no sound of rifle-fire comes, for the Boers must cower tight to the earth with that thing in the air, as a covey of partridges crouches when the peregrine's call is heard above them. A good shot! Up rises a warm brown column of earth from the very

eyebrow of the ridge, and after an interval back comes the faint roar of the exploding projectile. Another shell is sent howling on its way, falling this time over the crest-line, only the sound of its burst reaching our ears. Up from the ground below again little spots appear, and begin to creep upwards; the cavalry scouts are going to try their luck once more. They creep higher and higher, backed up by many other spots; they top the ridge and disappear over it. Then a helio begins to wink its brilliant eye at us; "all clear," "limber up," on we go again.

But the damage is done; back to the laager fly those thirty Boers. "The British are coming, commandant!" "Enteric seize them!" grumbles that officer, a gallant man and a bibulous, who has held his laager here for six months now undisturbed, with maledictions when news comes of other laagers evaporating into the thin air of "Handsupdorp."[1] Grumbling still, the stout Dopper beckons to two trusty Burghers, and bids them speed to headquarters to the Commandant General, that handsome, untruthful man, asking for reinforcements, or at any rate for orders. But there

[1] The generic term given by the Boers still in the field to the refugee camps within the British lines, wherein dwell the hundreds of Dutchmen who have surrendered, or "hands-upped."

is no time to wait for either, the British are inconveniently close, and enteric can hardly seize them before they arrive at that ridge dominating the camp, though God has been very good to his chosen in this respect;[1] does not every bed in those huge hospitals hold a babbling, fevered rooinek? The commandant points one finger at the ridge in question, and in a twinkling his men are upon it; no word of command, no standing upon the order of their going, just going, and in the very cunningest manner, here a man there a man, wriggling around hummocks, trotting up little rain-washed dongas, little, but good enough to hide a Dutchman, galloping across hollows, finally dismounting just under the crest, and crawling each man to a stone. There is a hasty adjustment of bandoliers, in go the clips, and the ridge is occupied and ready; the English for all their Zeiss glasses have not seen so much as the crown of a hat, nor will they unless a man drops his when the time comes to bolt. But look, over the rise a thousand yards ahead appear not hats but helmets, one, two, three, and more to follow, then faces, then burly

[1] This is not blasphemy but solid Boer conviction. A Boer Mishna would be a more complacent document than was ever compiled by Jew or Roundhead.

English bodies. The crouching Boers grunt; "wait!" growls a voice, and they wait. The silence is intense and to the oncomers reassuring; a dozen helmets appear, all at identically the same interval the one from the other; there is a pause, and then tituppy-toppity the advanced scouts canter over the ridge in full view. "Now!" growls the same voice, there is a rattle and a roar, around the approaching horsemen spurt a hundred little geysers of yellow dust. One man is down, no, it is his horse only; the rider leaps to his feet and scuttles, rabbit-wise, behind an ant-heap, the others, as if pulled by one string, swing round and are over the ridge again before you can say knife, at any rate before the Mausers can be recharged.

But the Burghers are not to have all the shooting, and are soon lying as flat as flounders behind their stones as the British scouts, having found a good spot, begin to pepper the ridge; buzz, buzz, come the bullets, hitting the stones with a smack that makes the squab faces behind them shrink and start. Even that dismounted pig is seeking to take revenge from behind his ant-heap for his slain horse, which lies like an inverted table, all four legs stiff in the air, and a good shot he is, *verdom* him! Now, too, away

on the right out of range, a considerable party of horsemen is stealing fast over the grass, like the shadow of a wind-swept cloud, appearing, disappearing over the billowy rises and in the dips. They are galloping for the right of the ridge two miles away, thus outflanking the Boers who hold the left thereof. They reach its foot, spread rapidly upwards, fan-wise, and in a few moments are on the summit: time to go, Burghers, if you mean to go! "Go!" roars the 4·7 from away back in the haze; "Go!" yells the immense projectile from the heights above, from middle air, from the riven earth, as it plunges with uproar terrific, amid whirling stones and steel and sheets of crimson flame ten yards in front of a sangar. The squab faces blanch as they press themselves against the ground in homage to that awful avatar. "Go!" again commands the angry far-off sailor with thunderous voice. They go; crawling and sidling down the hill, pale faces over shoulder, distended eyes marking the unseen track of the oncoming shell in the air. "Look where it comes again!" Was Hamlet's noiseless visitant as terrible as this shrieking thing of death? It bursts over the crest-line, hurling its fragments after the flying men. The latter reach their ponies, leap into the saddle, and are off like the

wind, bending low over the saddle-bow, still looking backwards. A dozen bullets from the cavalry, now on their left, sighing over them like a little breeze, send them faster, as bending yet lower, they speed up the opposite ridge, halt on its summit a second, and disappear all together, like dabchicks on a pond. On rolls the British column, one! two!—one! two!—as irresistible in its small way as the immense purpose it represents, no hurry, no lagging, no superfluous display of interest; how maddening to an enemy must be the steady middle-class determination which, having with little pother agreed that a thing, a ridge, a country, an empire is desirable, straightway proceeds to take it, the more certainly and silently the more buffets come in the taking.

There has been much talk and a pardonable fear of the Yellow Journalism, which has crept in amongst us like the blatant advertisements one finds inserted between the leaves of good and solid books new from the bookseller. There are those who see in this new journalistic cult a sign of disease or decay, the yellow flag of plague just unfurling from our ancient ship, signifying that the pestilence of public untruthfulness and hysteria, caught from infected foreign shores, is abroad. But surely there is no cause

for alarm. Has not this glaring, noisy rubbish-fire but illuminated the drab and dignified silence of the British nation in the colossal task with which it has found itself confronted? Found itself, I say, for the surprise of the discoveries made by our nation in South Africa would have sent weaker men running drivelling and afraid before the doors of Janus, whining for them to be shut lest worse befall.

Situation at 4 P.M., then, to borrow the phraseology of Aldershot, as follows: Red force (British) in possession of high ground commanding the late site of the enemy's laager; the latter, uncoloured, — unless one applies to them that antique hue not seen since Dr Johnson's day, "sad-coloured,"—in full retreat northwards. Broken their peace of months, packed and shifted the unclean *olla-podrida* of tarpaulins, seedy tents, and Wormwood-Scrubbian pots and pans, atoms which fortuitously concoursing, compose that unfloral anthology, a Boer laager (this in honour of our mention of the trisyllabic doctor!). But a Boer in flight is in his element, and never so full of resource and nerve. He is therefore the most recuperative soldier on earth, given a strong man, with a long strong tongue to meet him *in cursu*, to turn him, or at least stop him

with horrible revilings, and with a genius too common among Boer leaders to be properly termed genius, to point out to him a position as good or better than the one he has quitted. Nor do these particular Boers lack such a leader; they are stopped and turned, like a pack of riotous hounds on a false scent by the huntsman's rate, and sulkily consent to lie along the hill-crest for positively this night only. So throughout the bitter cold night they lie, blanketless, foodless, not over-sanguine of their commandant's blasphemous-pentateuchical promises of help on the morrow, a line of shivering Micawbers under the winter moon. Meantime the side-show methodically occupies their late ridge, methodically dines, and methodically lays itself down to slumber, all but the sentries who stand, rifle over shoulder, looking like black pumps against the sky, thinking of the village pub with its warm red blinds, and its amber beer, glowing with ruby and opal lights when held between the eye and the roasting fire; what an oxymoron of a thought, here on this freezing ridge! "Yes, it's please to walk in front, sir, when there's trouble in the wind"; but believe me, lonely soldier-man, there are eyes as kindly as the glow of the alehouse window looking towards you across the 7000

miles of chaos and old night—ay, from nearer than that; for the writer is but one of many who know the thoughts and wishes chasing each other in that helmeted head of yours, who hears, as plainly as he does the ring of your rifle-butt on the frozen stone, the inaudible cry you send up, "How long?"

Who has not felt a longing to apostrophise that romantic, uncanny, desperately uncomfortable hour which precedes the dawn? Clever men who have never seen it have done so beautifully, so beautifully and sympathetically that one is certain that they are clever, and that they have never seen it. But the "stupid" British army in South Africa, which sees it daily, pictorially speaking, leaves it severely alone, merely referring to it as such and such an hour G.M. How intensely cold it is at 4 G.M. on this hill-top of ours! the sleeping men look like lines of immense sugar-loaves so covered and stiff with hoar-frost are the blankets which cover them. It is time to get up, the cooks are already crouching over their eternal task, the lighting of fires. The sentry of the last relief, who has stood immobile for two hours, begins to stamp his feet, blow on his frozen fingers, and feign catarrh; the sergeant of the picket, knowing

the signs, looks at his watch. "Time to get them up," he mutters, eyeing the prone sugar-loaves with baleful stare. Then along the line the signal runs, no fluttering flags, but the burly, blue-nosed non-commissioned officer, reminding each grunting sleeper of England's expectation of him by a jog with the rifle-butt, or a caress from the toe of his ammunition-boot. On he goes, his Anathema answered by Maranatha from each and all of his victims, huge earth-shaking beast that he is. What in animated nature is so insupportable as a man awake whilst others sleep? But all are on their feet in no time. "No prayers, the morn being cold" (to misquote butterfly Pepys), blankets are rolled and packed on the waggons, breakfast bolted (shade of Heliogabalus, let us hope no portion of your punishment is early rising, to witness such fearsome speed in victualling!), and the troops are ready. Old Jones, muffled to the tips of his ears, is ready; old Nelson is ready, with an icicle dependent from the end of his twenty-foot nose, sniffing the morning air with an elevation of 3000 yards, that being the distance of the ridge in front.

During the night more than one message, flashed deviously by lamplight, has been re-

ceived from the other three columns engaged in the converging movement. All have had fighting: two have had considerable success, capturing a small laager, a Maxim gun, and a few prisoners. But all this delays marching, and no column of the three is where it should be for the present purpose, the enclosing and utter absquatulation of the commando which had faced and fled from Colonel Jones the previous day. So that there are bolt-holes to north and east, particularly unfortunate directions, as in them lie two towns, one as aforesaid the present Boer headquarters, the other also strongly held: alack! the "best laid schemes gang aft a-gley"; it is poor sport hunting foxes with the main earths unstopped. But there is yet a chance. If this commando can only be induced to stay where it is for the present, by judicious coquetting on its front, the other columns may make up lost time this day, and by evening the cordon be completed. The only force in position to do this being Colonel Jones's, he, on this frosty morning, ponderously determines to coquet, starting his delicate advances by sending his cavalry forward to "draw" the ridge in front. They go warily, every horse stepping like Agag, ears cocked, held short by the head, fearing

the worst. A reconnaissance must be agony to a horse, with his uncanny premonition of danger, and his anxious responding to anything tense in the atmosphere. But the ridge ahead is silent: higher and higher work the scouts, the taut reins relax, finally the leading men, as if by common impulse, take the bull by the horns, and trot briskly to the summit. It is empty! What game is brother Boer up to, that he lets the first trick go thus easily?

On go the cavalry main body, over the crest, disappearing from view down the reverse slope. With an instinct born of eighteen months' campaigning, the crowd upon the ridge behind bend their heads to listen for what seems bound to come. There is a pause, the intense silence of the early morning on the veldt rendered more intense by the stamp of a horse and the rattle of his head-chain. Then, like the roll from a tenor drum, the sound that all have been awaiting comes pulsating through the frosty air, rub-a-dub-a-dub-a-dub, the querulous rattle of Mausers making the most of their time with a transient target in front of them. It comes from a long low spur to our right front, pointing sideways like a huge index-finger across the slope down which our cavalry have trotted, and separated from it by

a rocky stream. Back like the wind thunder the latter, reappearing on the crest like a mob of wild horses,—no place for cavalry, an open slope under hot fire from across a stony spruit! They pull up with a jerk and dismount; the horses are led in bunches under cover, and soon an animated crackle from the crest is answering the diminishing fire from the spur. Old Jones snorts like a war-horse. "I must have that spur," says he, as indeed he must, seeing that it leads cunningly up to high ground from which the enemy can utterly command and enfilade our position. Who better to give it to him than those jolly harum-scarums the Colonial Irregulars? There is a bustle in their lines at the order to move out, a few moments' hurried conversation between old Jones and their white-moustached commander, then out they go, bump, bump, gingle, gingle, sombrero hats flapping as the pace increases, down into the valley and over the spruit, then with a hurroosh and a scamper up the opposite slope, straight for the razor-back of the spur, whilst the big gun lobs his shells deftly over them, dotting the razor-back with columns of powdery earth and smoke.

The Boers, whose nerves are not as good as they were in those halcyon days in Natal, do

not await the rush, but fly on the wings of terror down to a big donga they know of at the base of the spur. There, with the courage of rats in a hole, they turn and begin to pepper the ridge. The latter replying with interest, there is a fine set-to of musketry, which comes pealing across the valley to us on our hill, like the sound of rain upon a tin roof. The Boers have their backs to the wall, evidently, or can it be that they are being reinforced? Out with the telescope. Ah! what is that winding down the mountain-side beyond, now hidden beyond a spur, now appearing over the smooth slope like a long black caterpillar? Boers, by all that is unfortunate, and in strength, 500 at least! A malison on that headquarter town of theirs, and on the handsome untruthful man there commanding, with no eye for dramatic unities; behold him now complicating the plot in the most illicit fashion, turning our side-show into that which will be cheap at a guinea, much less a sixpenny-bit. See also on the high ridges in prolongation of the mountain, more Boers, dotting the skyline for miles, motionless as statues, no doubt scanning the punchbowl below them with field-glasses, ready enough if wanted. The commando on the mountain disappears in the vast recesses and kloofs at its base; away

over on the spur the firing has dwindled into a slow but continuous dropping fire, like the big drops before a thunder-storm, and indeed there is a thundery feeling in the air! That commando bodes no good, and old Jones, with an anxious face, orders a company of infantry to prepare to reinforce the Colonials upon the spur. But before they can move the storm breaks; there is a roar from the razor-back, an angry spitting reply from the donga—worse, from the height commanding the crest of the spur on its right. From our ridge we can see black spots hurrying over the lofty downs: they have outflanked our fellows, by jingo! Now, Nelson! The old salt gravely swings round half right, takes one careful squint at the speeding figures, then boom! "Bang in the middle of 'em!" yells every one. Well done, the spruce lord of thunder. Boom! and boom! again, before the first shell can land. Not for nothing has the big gun the magic letters Q.F. (quick-firing) emblazoned on his breech-block: he can hurry when there is need can the old salt. It is too much for the Boers: they check and dawdle undecidedly, a splendid target. Boom! a bull's-eye! they turn and flee whence they came: the flank is clear again.

But the gallant Colonials have not got off

scot-free either; an officer and two men are lying dead gripping the long grass. No more side-show for them, their little part is played. They are buried where they fell, and we from the ridge note in silence through our glasses the picks rising and falling as the grave is dug, and later the little group which stands around it, commending to God the vanished ethereal of the earthly which lies so pale within it. Oh, the pity of it! Other two are jolted into us severely wounded; one dies as soon as the white-covered waggon creeps behind our lines. At nightfall he too is laid to rest, and a sudden silence falls on chattering groups around the fires as the "Last Post" calls with an infinity of pathos from the little valley behind up to his ascending soul, Good-bye! good-bye! Your duty done, comrade, turn into rest, awaiting the tremendous *réveillé* which shall waken all men.

On the approach of night, the colonel sends orders to those on the spur to evacuate, and to retire on to the main position. The movement is effected without opposition, and all hands settle down together again, wondering not a little as they roll into the blankets as to the vagaries of shows in general, and of this side-show in particular.

But even before the first snore rises the situation changes. There is a sudden exclamation from a sentry, and a bustle at the signal-station. Is not that a lamp flashing away close by to the north-west, blink-a-blink, blink-blink? So the column on our left is in touch after all; now we shall see what we shall see. Off with a message to them, "Join us at dawn"; two Turks are better than one Turk all the world over, by sword-stroke or otherwise. The side-show rolls over in its blankets again, and is soon trumpeting to the stars its peace of mind.

Dawn again—no lazy sergeant-ridden dawn this time, but all men astir and ready at the first streak, looking towards the ridge from whence the lamp was blinking last night. Here they come, making best pace across the rolling veldt, horse, foot, and artillery; their advanced scouts are already within hail. The colonel trots down the slope to meet the commanding officer, his plan already made. There are some farms nestling below the long slope, of which the spur seized yesterday is the summit, and they are known to contain supplies and forage, possibly women; all three munitions of war to the enemy — the latter perhaps the most valuable. What trait was it in old Mother Eve

that has lived through the ages to animate at last these stout-hearted daughters of far-away Friesland, uncouth shrews for the most part, but with something of stubbornness, of courage —nay, considering that their share in the buffets is but the taking of them—of heroism in them, which has spurred their fathers and brothers to the conflict more than all the mere concrete cooking, comfort, and information they have been able to supply? British arms have had no more powerful, insidious enemy than this herd of unenlightened, one-idea'd treacherous women, wherein, not only from the Boer point of view, but from that of all surveyors of mankind, they are to be thanked as contributing to history something very much better than Carlyle's "flat Nothing." Patriotism is at all times a formidable thing, and difficult to uproot, but never so difficult as when it is imbedded like a reef of gold in the solid bedrock of ignorant womanhood, perhaps never so golden and beautiful, shaming the surrounding rubbish into something very like oblivion. We hope that in days to come, when the passion and hate of this conflict have returned dead to their father Death, men will speak of the fair things they have seen as freely as of the base and ignoble. It has always been the custom of

the English to underestimate their enemy before rushing at him, but never until this war to vilify him when down. There has been much of the base and ignoble in our enemy, 'tis true, and but little fair, but, good lack! in what mine again is the gold in tons and the rubbish in ounces? Courage is fair, grit and stoutness of purpose are fair, death *pro patria* is fair; have not the Boers shown them all, unmistakable amid the treachery, bigotry, and vice — the rubbish which alone has been visible to too many of our seers?

So in these farms below us is something worth the taking, and the colonel means to take it. The spur must be recaptured as a preliminary: the Mounted Infantry of the new column shall try their luck this time; quick march every one else for the ridge in front of us, that which was yesterday held by our cavalry. It is soon reached, and is found to be of a semi-circular shape, with the convex side towards the enemy, and the troops, when disposed along its crest, will be able to afford a very pretty exposition of diverging fire. Away over on the spur the Boers are standing up watching our movements, being particularly thick on a little stony knob half-way up the sweeping slope, making the summit look quite

bristly with their crowd of tiny upright figures. The two field-guns, arrived with the reinforcement, mark them for their own, and bellow simultaneously at the precise moment chosen by old Nelson up on the ridge behind for his sonorous "Begone!" The figures disappear before the projectiles can reach them, shell follows shell as the Mounted Infantry move out to their appointed task. They are in good hands are these "mounted feet"; no more dashing commander than their gallant captain, late of the Hussars, has ever galloped before his men. See how they extend whilst at a fast trot, which, as they breast the opposite slope, changes to a canter, then a gallop, then a swift irresistible rush as they near the summit; they are upon it in a twinkling, despite an agitated pop! pop! from the boulders which cover it, — a gallant sight, beholding which the breath is held in anxiety and admiration. Not legitimate Mounted Infantry work, an Aldershot critic would say, this charging of kopjes. Perhaps not, but something very much better, my purist friend— soldiers' work; the work of the handy man, who, seeing a job ahead, does it in the quickest possible time without reference to a textbook. South Africa will henceforth be known

as the grave of certain regulations eke of reputations.

This time the Boers, thoroughly unnerved, do not stay their flight, but gallop madly back to the high hills beyond, pursued by the shells from the 4·7 to the extreme limit of his range. One, dropping a few yards in front of the mob, turns them as a flock of sheep are turned by the dog. They race up a donga to the left and pull up out of range, but in full view, on the side of a mighty green down. Oh for that missing north-easterly column of ours! Would British troops but appear where they should appear, on the higher ridge behind them, that commando would be on the march to Handsupdorp to-night. But the farms are clear at any rate. Two mule-waggons are sent bowling down to them with an escort. No women, only a confused mass of bedding, furniture, and household goods; the buildings are fairly stuffed with the stuffy belongings of a Boer family or families. In one room alone there are seven beds ranged alongside one another; a regular barracks this farm, and an ordnance store to boot, for the lofts are full of fodder and mealies, refreshment for man and beast. Out with them all, no time to dawdle with that commando angrily looking

on from the shelf above: already a few of the more adventurous spirits have crept forward and begin to snipe at the groups around the farms. The mealies, &c., having been flung out into a heap, a match is set to them and they flare up with a roar.

Now a note is brought to the officer in charge —"Have found the women hiding in the spruit-bed." And lo! they came along the path, a piteous, untidy procession, — women in dirty sun-bonnets, old, young, middle-aged, with children multitudinous hanging to their skirts with terrified grip. No pleasant task this. On to the waggons with them, first flinging mattresses, bedding, bundles of clothing (already packed in anticipation of a move). Now ladies, please, forgive us, it is our duty, and after all each one of you may mean another week's war if we leave you in peace, to feed those scoundrels up there on the mountains. Away we go, two waggon-loads full, full speed up the slope, with the shells singing over our heads towards the snipers, and the long whips cracking like rifle-shots. One woman secretly throws away a bit of crumpled paper. It is picked up and opened, a letter to one of the Boer officers from his wife. Listen, reader, and judge if a woman be a munition of war or no:—

"Beloved husband," it begins, "the British are in sight, and the bombs are already coming over our house. Now I know, like you, what it is to be under shell-fire. If I am taken, do not think of me; fight on to the very last, and God keep you in safety."[1]

Is there nothing of nobility in this? If there be not, nobility must be but an affair of frontiers after all, not to be found beyond its political boundaries, instead of the cosmopolitan thing one has been comforted to imagine it. No wonder, with letters like this in his filthy wallet, that so many a lazy porcine Burgher has found it in his soul to forgo his ignoble inclination, the *otium sine dignitate* which is so remarkably good enough for him, to set his teeth "and fight to the last."

It is now near closing-time for our Side-Show. The big arena calls two out of the four performers in it to more heroic "turns," and the other two must return whence they came, to duties even less tinselled and exciting—the dull daily round and common task of guarding the lines of communication. The mule-waggons arriving at the ridge find the "properties" already packed, and all things in order for a

[1] An exact translation of a letter actually dropped by a Boer woman under circumstances such as related above.

move. Once more then see the column on the march, baggage in front this time, stepping it out for home, pipes alight, helmets awry as before, one ! two !—one ! two !—as imperturbable with purpose defeated behind them as when it was unknown before them. Is not this a more unique trait than the other in the psychology of nations, and to a foe more disheartening ? Curses on this wooden battering-ram of a people, they falter neither in defeat nor victory ; can nothing shake them ? A question asked in too many quarters not to set the cynical laughing at Peace Conferences and similar mighty hypocrisies. But the Boers, most practical of investigators, see in this little column wending its way homewards an excellent field for experiment. It is not often that philosophers have before them the concretion of an idiosyncrasy to poke and prob at, wherein war is blessed amongst the sciences. Pursuing it no man need say, " I wonder," or "it is probable," who has two legs and arms from Heaven, and from Gehenna the paraphernalia of the science, for can he not straightway test his theories to the point of proof most positive ? War is in truth a conflict between characteristics as much as between rifle and rifle,—the timid fly before the bold, the doubtful hesitate in the faces of the determined. How curious has it often

been to watch these warring spirits in action, with never a shot fired from the coarser weapons, merely the shift and sway of bodies of men whose psychological armaments are meeting each other in the empty air as surely as their bodies will, when the stronger *Geist* of one side has prompted it to hurl itself upon that with the weaker.

And the Boers have a *Geist* which impels them almost irresistibly around the heels of a retreating enemy. I say "almost," for there have been occasions when the artificial spirit of discipline has put up her iron hand to bar the way, and the truer wraith has been stopped, to the great loss of its owners, as must ever be when genuine tendencies are checked in any affair of life.[1]

But here there is nothing of this. No sooner has the rear-guard moved off than the Boers are after them, enveloping the flanks, firing from every little hollow and donga, galloping unseen to within a few hundred yards of the rearmost Britons. The latter halt and face about, there is

[1] Many Boers have assured me that only the threats of their commandants kept the men in the trenches watching the British army retiring from Colenso, and other places. It requires no great tactical knowledge to perceive how greatly this semi-discipline of the enemy on such occasions militated against them, and in our favour.

a sharp interchange of fire, then a sudden cessation of the fusilade from the enemy's side. The Boers have no idea of being hit back, so they lie flat and wait, until reassured by the silence the infantry rise and resume their march after the column. Up get the Dutchmen again, bang! bang! bang! others canter up and the fire is redoubled. The company of the rear-guard, sorely pestered, halts again, and a message is sent forward to the field artillery. The two guns are unlimbered, and open fire over the heads of the prone men, making splendid practice, the Boer fire ceasing at the second shell. There is another pause, then another shrapnel to make sure, and on we go again. Ten minutes later, bang! bang! bang! again from behind, and an exact repetition of the former nuisance of halting and unlimbering the guns. Three times more does this happen before the column, having crossed a drift at the foot of the ridges, enters a stretch of bare veldt where the Boers cannot follow without exposure. There have been a few casualties, a mounted infantryman killed, two others missing, but a lucky shrapnel was seen to drop two or three of the little black mounted figures who incautiously showed themselves on

a ridge. Thereafter the march is unmolested, and our Side-Show, only one of hundreds of its sort, ceases to have any interest, if indeed it ever had any, with such mighty goings-on to be seen all around for the asking.

XIII.

THE PASSING OF A NATION.

A GROUP of British officers, of which the writer formed one, was lately listening to the remarks of an educated, if slightly offensive, Boer official upon the war. In the course of them he made the following statement: "This war has caused to arise a mutual respect between my people and yours, hitherto unknown to either." The remark was received in silence whilst the speaker was yet present, and contemptuously pooh-poohed when he had gone. "Respect, indeed! My people and yours," the Boers and the British Empire in one breath, the elephant and the earwig which annoyed him! The remark was preposterous. Deep down in the hearts of those militaires lurked the conviction that it was *true!*

To the mere unthinking soldier there has been something infinitely pathetic in this struggle. I

say to the mere soldier, for of course the great Public, *affairé* and astute as it is, up to every move on the board, and well behind all the scenes its unique national safety does not require it to be actually in, is perfectly aware that it has been a war of just vengeance upon a bullying, treacherous, and cowardly conglomeration of bigots, dead to all that vivifies the world, hating all that other men love, quenching all that other men call light. In which respect, as in others, the campaign has been unique. It is the soldiers who have been tolerant, while the great civilian world at home shouted at them to slay and spare not. Hardly a general but has been charged with "criminal lenience" to the captives, or the men he should have made the captives, of his bow and spear; hardly a victory which has not been discounted in the public press because the bayonets were not pushed home over their very spring-catches in blood. And all very right and proper. War is not a picnic, and it must be ended as soon as possible with little consideration for the vanquished. Proclamations, as will be shown later, *have* been diluted with too much of the milk of human kindness; flying commandos *have* been allowed to gallop away in affright unmolested. We have *not* done "what the Russians would have

done"; but the question is, Is it invertebrate folly to say that we have done as much as we ought, and enough to make a future loyal and loving son of the child we have had to chastise? Let me say at once that I have no intention of answering it, *ne sutor*, &c., to say nothing of a much more obstructive tag, *non-possumus;* but it may not be uninteresting to travel as far as the half-way house to the answer, a little understanding of the Boer himself, as apart from what is nearly his negative pole, his leader.

It is curious that a nation so rich in historical experience as our own should have made the callow mistake of damning a whole community because of its having gone astray like sheep after false and thieving shepherds; yet this is exactly what the English nation has done. It is not a usual error of ours either. Many a time and oft have we thrashed an enemy with one hand whilst with the other we wiped away a tear for the faults we secretly half admired. To take recent instances: how loudly sang the leading articles of the nobility of the hillmen of the Indian frontier, those handsome Afridis and Orakzais, gentlemen of the mountains, with stuff in them as sterling as that which composed the men whose corpses they mutilated! They meant no harm, bless them, by breaking their

solemn oaths up there amongst the peaks: it was all that unmentionable mad Mullah, or perhaps the Amir, unsolved political *x*, or perhaps again the huge, glum Russian bear, for ever hibernating in the background. The Dervishes, too, no language could describe the romantic grandeur of that inchoate mass of bandits. Was it because they were obliging enough to rush upon the Lee-Metfords in what may be called the "hundred-acre formation," or because there were ugly whispers of red breeches and *képis*—the uniform of the misleaders of innocence—having been seen in their camps? But the poor Boers have had to do without anything of this sort, and wondrous well they have managed. Nothing romantic about them, with their dingy clothes, their rough tats, and their squab, unshaven features. Nothing heroic either: have they not kept pusillanimously under cover when heaven has afforded them unlimited glorious chances of coming out into the open? Nothing noble or sentimental; these things are not for men named Swart or Potgeiter or Coetzee! Led by villains, they have outvillained their leaders. Think of the "white flag incidents," numberless, unspeakable for treachery and cruelty. Think of, think of—everything! The case against these cursed Dutchmen is

overwhelming: it is needless to multiply indictments; they are abominable, impossible, they have been a terrible hindrance to our troops; they must go under! Poor Boers! Yes, you must go under, you are an anachronism, a stumbling-block, a "black patch" upon the map of Progress; but before you disappear, hear a soldier confess that this is all that is amiss with you. You are *not* vile, cowardly, or even more treacherous than a similarly compounded *olla-podrida* of undisciplined Europeans would be. You are not impossible. Nay, you are very possible indeed, and will, under cleaner rule, emerge from the pit into which you have fallen, to plant your ungainly, useful feet upon sunlit ground again. We have beaten you, but pride in the victory should be sufficient consolation. Men do not throw up their hats and cheer when they have stepped upon a beetle, but only when they have overcome something formidable. Vile or not, we have beaten you, and we cheer. Reflect and be comforted!

If the average Englishman were asked to give his idea of the Boer nation, he would probably reply enigmatically, "They are *not* a simple, pastoral people." What fun has been poked at this claim of theirs, bitter fun too for the most part, bristling with the contempt which all

men, Pecksniff included, always feel for Pecksniffianism. Yet it is difficult for one who has seen anything of the Boer at home to describe him otherwise than as simple and pastoral. The latter he is of course: it is unnecessary to waste time in proving the obvious. He is a farmer of farmers; his whole horizon, mental as well as geographical, is bounded by his two or three hundred acres of veldt and mealies. Except on occasions of direct necessity or solemnity, such as infrequent shopping expeditions, or those curious foregatherings of the unsociable called Nachtmaalen, he never leaves his ring-fence. He is the most unclubbable man on earth. Not only does he shun the sight of his neighbour, but he will not if he can help it even gaze upon his neighbour's house. Many a Dutch farm is most studiously located, so that it and the nearest homestead may be mutually invisible. He thinks and dreams (chiefly dreams, for he is an astounding sleeper) of his little domain and its population of beasts, children, and Kaffirs (I name them in order of merit). He dies upon it and is buried upon it, as his father was before him, and as his loose-limbed lout of a son will be after him.

Now as to his simplicity. Let me here point out that the converse of simplicity is not, as

the vast majority of my countrymen seem to believe, cunning. Nay, more, as students of national character are well aware, so far from being antitheses these two qualities go more often than not hand in hand. The savage is simple, he is also invariably cunning; so it is with the Boer. He is cunning to a degree,—no greater adept at petty overreaching ever lived. No tie of relationship or affection is so close that the loved one is safe from his extraordinary meanness and his passion for getting something for nothing. And yet there is no man easier deceived by the appearance of honesty, obviously a providential disposition of the nettle and dock-leaf order in a land of swindlers. If every Dutchman robs and lies to his neighbour, the victims rob and lie to their spoilers with equal success when their turn comes. On small issues matters thus equalise themselves in a very satisfactory manner. It is on the big issues that trouble comes, when colossal rogues with quite abnormal honesty writ large upon their features, and the inferential integrity of bottomless money-bags behind them,—when such folks as these come frankly in at the farmyard gate and offer tremendous somethings for comparative nothings, it is then that our Boer, whilst assuming his cunningest aspect, shows the utter

simplicity, nay, to coin a word, simpleton-ness of his character. Try and "do" him over an ox, and you will fail. But his allegiance and faith, and eventually his very country, are yours if you play your cards right. The British nation are great discoverers, but they let the Hollanders make this discovery first; and they have been fighting to make up the leeway ever since, adding to the severity of the struggle by their persistence in regarding the Boer as a deep plotter, whereas his very simplicity has been the most immovable obstacle from start to finish. They have done it at last. They need never fear a recrudescence of trouble in South Africa. But it would be far otherwise were the Boers really what we have so long considered them, crafty and artful intriguers. They would then lie low, and bide their time, as beaten plotters have done before, as many believe that the vast Indian population is doing now, as the Chinese have certainly been doing since our last domiciliary visit.

This petty cunning of the Boer, the dominating trait in his character, is particularly noteworthy in that to it must be attributed by far the greater part of his unexpected success in the field. In higher tactics he has confessedly failed. Beaten armies have retired before him unpursued and at their leisure; important

strategical points have been needlessly abandoned, unimportant ones wastefully garrisoned; obvious flank movements have been misconstrued into feints, and frontal attacks allowed to roll back without the annihilation they merited. In fact, the greatest condemnation one can pass upon the Boer strategy is, that it has been as faulty throughout the war as that of the British at the outset. But there are few soldiers who will not freely admit that in individual action, in what may be called man-to-man tactics, the Boers have been exasperatingly superior to our own people. How seldom our patrols and scouts have been able to catch theirs napping may be judged by the vast amount of triumph lavished upon solitary instances. The "personal encounter" history of this campaign would be a volume of absorbing interest. The writer has heard, of course, numberless true accounts of such episodes, often from men who emerged from them wounded, too often from eyewitnesses who saw the Briton fire his last shot, not half as often as one would like from the vanquisher in the tourney. The net result is what I have stated, that in small cunning the Boer is unequalled, and consequently holds in small affairs a great advantage over braver, but less guileful, opponents.

But it must not be inferred that the Boers are cowards. No more contemptible injustice was ever done to beaten enemies than that which by far too great a portion of our usually impartial press has been done to these Dutchmen. Instances of bravery, nay, of heroism, have been so numerous and so sustained, that it would be an insult to the doers of the deeds to catalogue them in any way as *lusus naturæ* in dispositions naturally craven; and of collective heroism, withal, astonishing in a soldiery brought up in a school of pure individualism. Witness the staunch stand in the trenches at Pieter's Hill, under a rain of huge projectiles the like of which no soldier has ever seen before, or the dash upon Broadwood's guns at Tigerpoort, or the forlorn-hope against Wagon Hill, when, if the British army had not been blessed with souls as bold, it had surely lost a division from its list, and a town from its safe keeping. The British army can ill brook such enemies being labelled "cowards." The Boers are brave men: in the name of fair play, let no one state otherwise, and let all, if possible, refrain from criticism too scathing because their tactics are not ours, because they have a rooted objection to the open, to being surrounded, or to fighting at the bottom of a hill when the top is available to

them. We can assure the reader that their antipathy to these things is shared to the full by our own troops, though certainly there have been incidents which might give colour to the supposition that such circumstances were actually preferable to them!

The many white flag incidents it is of course impossible to defend, even if defence were our object. The writer holds no brief for the Boers; he has had, and still has, *pendente lite*, that healthy animosity towards them without which a campaign would be a terrible ordeal to a conscientious man. The incidents have been detestable and inexcusable. No amount of savage warfare (some one must write a history of the combats, literally *à outrance*, between Boers and blacks) can palliate them; no amount of battle-smoke can hide the red stain of pure unadulterated murder of white men by white men. I have often spoken of this matter to Dutchmen, and the only excuses worth mentioning have been, firstly, the savage warfare plea; and, secondly, that the offenders were no Dutchmen at all, but foreigners, Frenchmen or Irish. This, as a matter of fact, has been proved a lie; but it is needless to expatiate upon the matter. Treachery brings its own punishment, not the least of which is the profound sympathy felt by

British for the few honourable Boer fighting men, whose honour has been irretrievably besmirched by the deeds of their comrades. It may be taken as an axiom that, next to defeating the enemy, an army's greatest desire is to win his admiration and respect. The "white flag incidents" have wellnigh banished both on our part. The writer can state from his personal knowledge that the loss has not been unnoticed and unregretted by at least a few, and the best, Dutchmen.

It is, of course, impossible to speak with any certainty at this stage; but it would really seem as if the "conquest idea," so universally attributed to the Boers at the commencement of hostilities, was but another journalistic myth. I have had ample opportunity lately of unobtrusively elucidating many little points in the Boer argument, hitherto obscure or wrongly illuminated, to the great enlightenment of myself, at least. Not by questioning, of course —that is a fatal method of attempting to extract the truth from a Transvaaler, possibly the most frank and accomplished liar of all the motley sons of Sapphira—but by the noting of chance remarks, listening to tales of woe, boring in the extreme except in so far as they might contain evidence of disappointed aspirations or greed. With the best or worst will in the world, no

shred of the Pretoria to Durban theory could be fitted in, not a suspicion of contemplated flesh-pots in the Garden Colony, never a hint of the sea-coast, at least in the case of the hundred or so typical Burghers to whom it has been my duty to be guide, confidant, and friend during the past ten weeks. It seems a pity to destroy picturesque ideals; but I am almost compelled to believe that a vast percentage of the Boers went out on commando against the English for the unromantic but apparently sufficient reason "that they were told to"! A non-existent ambition has been manufactured for them: if there is an itch from which the mass of the Boer nation suffers less than any other, it must be the *cacoethes regendi*. The very notion of conquest, what it implies, and the advantages accruing from it, must be necessarily absent from minds stunted by generations of the pettiest of agricultural calculations, and inhabiting bodies which have existed upon the same mealie-fields since they became bodies. The explanation is an ignoble one; but it is possibly as true as many others of its level would be found to be, if people would but consent to pull the Boer down from the pedestal of accomplished avarice and intrigue built up for him by twenty years of dislike and complete misconception. He is not a heroic

scoundrel, but an oafish, solid, slow, and obedient underling, who does "what he is told," and would not understand his Adelphi reputation if it were explained to him.

Too much capital, again, has been made out of his well-known hatred of the British nation. It exists, of course, and is very bitter and deep-seated; it is, in fact, the third portion of his creed, the other two being his God, a force acting directly upon his atomic fate and interests, and his farm, which, God-ridden, colours his whole life from birth to death. It may appear blasphemous to refer to the Almighty as a "force," or to any human belonging as being "ridden" by Him; but this is literally the Boer conception of the Supreme Being. His vote would be "solid" on many of the controversial questions which vex the souls of churchmen at home,—the Actual Presence, for instance, or the efficacy of prayer—Burgher prayer, that is—for is he not taught to consider himself as one of God's only chosen? Evil times are to him punishments for sin, joyous ones rewards for virtue: he is a bigot of bigots, and would be a fanatic if his religious convictions had ever been set on fire by attrition with disbelief. And his hatred of us and all our ways is as immovable and as uninstructed. But it is difficult, in the

light of recent gleanings impossible, to believe that it is strong enough to have drawn him into a tremendous conflict, and more wonderful still to have kept him in it. After all, there is nothing definite in his hatred — it is but a nebulous creed-feeling. I have puzzled many a Boer by entreating him to state his case against us. Whilst he was victorious, his martyrising himself in uncomfortable laagers, and on the windy summits of mountains (the Boer hates a hill), was intelligible enough. But when the tide turned, and according to his own most ingrained faith his God was no longer on his side, a hatred ten times as great could never have kept him in the field. No man in the world has a surer instinct as to when a thing ceases to be "good enough." Something stronger must be looked for, and it is to be found, I think, in the reiterated reason given by the Dutchmen themselves, "because they were told to," because a thing more powerful than religion, or home ties, or hatred, had got its grip upon them—*public opinion*—none the less resistless because it was the creation of one great, but evil and short-sighted man, in his turn under the influence of many little but far-seeing men, at the very time he imagined his influence over them to be most paramount. A dull majority

is a sure prey to a smart minority, a truism of government to which the Boers are no exception. This has been pointed out before so often, that the excuse for repeating it must be, that it has as constantly been urged as an additional crime of the Dutch, instead of as a palliation of what, after all, has been no crime, only a colossal blunder.

Aiding and abetting this resistless public opinion, there has existed a discipline amongst the Boer nation of which the world, the Boers themselves, never dreamt. The quick wits in the political Hoofdlaager have handled it with consummate skill: perhaps they even created it. Events like the Jameson raid strengthened and confirmed it. I do not here speak of military discipline in the field, though that has been sufficiently marvellous and unexpected; but of what may be called domestic and political discipline, amenability as a whole to orders from headquarters, malleability under one pair of strong hands, acquiescence in uncomfortable schemes stated to be for the public good,—qualities only to be expected, as a rule, in commonweals of very ancient foundation, whose units have learnt to trust their leaders and each other. The Boers have trusted neither. In spite of his heroics and his heavy polls, Paul

Kruger has always been a suspected man; and as for his neighbour, the Boer distrusts him by nature. The nation was too young for mutual faith; the President's rule was too old not to have been discredited, yet the nation pulled as one team to the President's driving. A unique spectacle, for which I maintain we may thank the virile, scoundrelly scene-shifters at Pretoria.

Now that the rugged old coachman has driven them to their political doom, another curious circumstance may be remarked which will no doubt be made much of by future historians. In the past the law of life has seemed to have been much the same for communities as for individuals—both have their birth in pain and trouble, their early difficulties, their strong youth and stronger manhood, their gradual decline and ultimate fall. No nation has ever leapt at once into maturity or been dashed to extinction without many premonitory totterings. Yet here we have a nation cut off from its purely national life in the very flower of its youth—nay, before it has, so to speak, forgotten its teeth-cutting. Kruger's *régime* has been the Boers' first step upon the world's ladder; it has been their last. Henceforth, however high they may climb, it will not be the Vierkleur that bears the strange device *Excel-*

sior. Surely there must be some explanation known to students of progress for this early death of a strong young man. The corruption of his mentors does not explain it. Other nations have worried their way to centuries of prosperity under more unscrupulous leadership, nations, too, with far less natural backbone than that which stiffens these sons of Holland. All nations, in fact, have started with "might is right" as their motto, until the squeamishness born of civilisation and security has led them to apply to the Herald's College of the world for a reversal of the brazen legend. Have these Dutchmen been peculiarly unfortunate? It would seem so, since fate has led them to collide with the only race the world has ever seen which gains in vigour with increasing age. The British nation is giving the lie to all history and all rules. Its "life"—from the insurance-office point of view—is a marvel. Tabulatorily speaking, it is a monstrosity, and perhaps wonder is therefore wasted when it rises in what should be decrepit senility, and imperturbably absorbs a youthful nation rejoicing in its strength! But this is but the speculation of an ignoramus. Some hand skilled in the analysis of "movements" and great happenings generally should set to work on a problem so enthralling that

even an ignoramus can be vastly interested in its solution.

Of the military discipline of the Boers it would be unnecessary to speak had it not been so consistently impugned from the beginning of the war up to its present stage. As I write (the early days of September) the Boer main body is being hustled back into its last corner after a retirement of unprecedented mileage and hurry, and there is every indication of its planting its back against the wall for a final stand, or, worse still, breaking up into small and desperate bodies, to continue the struggle north of the Middleburg-Delagoa railway. Think what this army of Louis Botha's has done and suffered, and let us hear no more of Boer *demoralisation.* First of all, some months of unexpected success with a British army corps, recoiling from tremendous and pluckily defended positions, weary and decimated, and not shattered only because of its own magnificent discipline. Even in those fortunate days we heard not a little of dissension and insubordination in the Boer ranks, of multitudes being "sick of the war." Then after February 16, when the great fort behind Colenso had to be hurriedly evacuated, nothing but retreat after retreat, flight after flight,

herculean toil at entrenchments, rendered useless by outflanking movements, loss of conquered ground, worst of all, loss of a prize long looked on as already won — Ladysmith and its garrison. Bad news from all sides, loss of Kimberley, of Mafeking, of Bloemfontein, of Pretoria, of everything they had hoped to win, of everything they never thought to lose.

It is safe to say the Boers have too much innate knowledge of war to have allowed themselves to get unduly elated over the minor successes which set off these vital losses. One can imagine, for instance, the *cui bono* feeling with which the commandos flying eastwards from Pretoria heard of the capture of a British battalion at Roodeval. What relief, when fifty battalions were hard at their heels, with that little grey man in their midst, with his map, and his telescope, and his quiet confabulations with the huge, iron-faced dervish-killer he had brought with him? What relief, when up from Ermelo the growling of bulldog Buller was already audible, unshakable man, with his unbreakable battalions? What relief, even though De Wet was whirling about the Free State like a wasp in a bedroom, stinging pluckily, and evading all the heavy eager hands smack-

ing at him? There are not many instances in history of an army sustaining misfortunes so many and so grievous, and yet remaining an army. When we consider the composition of Botha's force, the perfect freedom of his men to come and go as they please, the certain safety for them if they basely go, the certain peril if they stoutly stay, that they stay and present front after front, endure smashing after smashing, is to my mind a spectacle as admirable as it is marvellous.

The discipline that can do these things must be of the best, for meanwhile an article of the creed is jogging every conscience: the farm is going to rack and ruin, and another month's idleness for the plough means that most awful of catastrophes, a cropless spring. Yet the plough remains idle and the *frau* shades her eyes in vain as she looks for the form of her absent "man" across the great yellow rolls of the veldt. Something infinitely pathetic, is there not, in all this, though we know well enough that the absentee is away fighting for the most nefarious tyranny that ever cursed a land? Let us allow him his excuse: it has been accepted from far worse men. To his blinded eyes that nefarious tyranny spelt liberty. Poor Burgher! Will nothing but

extermination alter the reading? It looks very much like it, but your blood will *not* be upon your own head.

It was Lord Beaconsfield who said, in answer to a lady gushing over the noble traits brought out from men by war, that for one fine quality ten evil ones were produced. It is very doubtful if he was right; but if for the word "evil" he had substituted "curious" or "illogical," the apophthegm would have been indisputable. Two incidents occur to the writer which may be of interest as sidelights on the Boer character. A party of mounted infantrymen, carelessly approaching a farm over which the white flag of surrender was flying, were surprised by a volley from its walls, and galloped away, leaving one of their number dead upon the ground. When they had disappeared, one of the treacherous shooters came out from the farm-building and added to his atrocious villainy by robbing the still warm corpse of £15. Some time afterwards, when that little party had almost forgotten the occurrence, as men do in this land of swift forgettings, a Boer bearing a white flag entered their camp, and on behalf of a comrade, who desired to be nameless, handed in to the murdered man's commanding officer the sum of £15!

The second incident is similar, and almost more inexplicable. The scene is of the same description, too — a white-flagged farm, with a party of mounted men approaching it. This time, however, the black attendant circumstances are blacker, for those horsemen are proceeding to the farm by express invitation of a number of Dutchmen within, who have formally intimated their desire to surrender, and have asked to be escorted into camp, as they fear to come alone. A volley, as before, and several empty saddles; one white sergeant and several black scouts killed on the spot, and a trooper with a smashed thigh upon the ground. Out come the assassins and carry the wounded man into the house, where there is a field-cornet. That trooper afterwards described the attentions he received as womanly, and shortly afterwards left for his own camp in an ambulance-waggon, with a "tip" from the field-cornet in his pocket![1] Possibly every campaign ever fought may supply curios of human nature equally puzzling to the analyst; but the above would be difficult to beat. Alas! they are straws which, we fear, do *not* show

[1] These are facts,—the victim in the first instance being a soldier of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, and in the second a trooper of Lord Strathcona's incomparable Horse.

which way the prevailing wind of the Boer character blows; for they might indicate a sense of honour, or at least a film of conscience over a bottomless well of remorselessness. Neither honour nor conscience has much place in the moral composition of the Transvaaler. Men who know him well would repudiate a charge of cynicism, because they attributed the first *amende* to a fear on the part of the repentant thief of being recognised and brought to book; and the second as a desperate attempt to soothe the angry Britons into sparing the farm from whose windows their comrade was murdered. They might not be far wrong in the present instances, at any rate. The "first murderer" is at this moment a fugitive on the face of the veldt, afraid to fight on, more afraid to surrender, a piteous son of Cain; and an organised conspiracy is lying its best and hardest to obtain release and compensation for the owner of the second farm, which a night or two later blazed as a burning ghat over the poor sergeant's dead body.

The Boers have almost uniformly treated their prisoners well, for which they have obtained more credit than the act deserves. Strange as it may seem, there is a universal disposition amongst fighting men to be civil

and attentive to their captives, which may explain in some measure why a general, the soul of British honour, suffered the foul hand of an assassin to lie in friendship in his own for a moment. How Tommy squirmed and swore, ay, and his officers too, when they heard of the entertainment offered to that wretch of Potchefstroom—ham and champagne, and a guard of honour, and a bear-leading general officer to see the creature safely and comfortably down to the sea—what time they themselves were crouching, half-starved and desperately weary, in the bullet-pocked sangars of Pieter's Hill! One wonders what the Boers thought of it all. They are peculiarly insusceptible of kindness, having that much of savagery in them which leads them to misconstrue it into weakness. How obvious their astonishment has been at the treatment meted out to them when they have fallen into our hands!

It is to be feared that the "pass" system, by which a surrendering Burgher is permitted to return to his farm, with privileges as if he had never lifted rifle against us at all, has undone a great deal of the good our victories have done for us. The "simpleton's argument" must be carried to its logical conclusion if it is to be effectual. The reinstatement of farmers should

have been invested with more ceremony, and after a longer interval between the time of surrender and of return to the farm. It has been almost amusing to see the stream of Burghers trotting in to some of the camps, handing over the Mausers, gabbling over the oath (which most of them do not understand at all, so high falutin is its phraseology, and would not feel bound to observe it if they did), then "loping" cheerfully off back to the farm, where the goodwife is probably waiting tea for them as if they had only been absent since breakfast-time! Confidence begets confidence. Next day back they all trot again to the self-same camp, with tales of lost cattle, broken fences, departed niggers, and references to compensation for the same, simply alarming in their colossal impudence. These men are not beaten as they should be, and may give trouble again —are sure to if a chance offers, as the sudden appearance of commandos, composed almost to a certainty of oath-breakers, on the lines of communication has proved. Whereas a more judicious line of treatment would have imbued them with a proper sense of their position, and of the really unprecedented generosity of their conquerors. It would cost money, of course, to pack them all down to guarded laagers at a

base town, there to reflect in the "earwig-and-elephant" strain for a month or so; but it would be money well laid out. The "pass" Boers are not beaten, they were only bribed and bored into surrendering, and will be found to be individually worth six of their "Ceyloned" friends if any future trouble ever empties the farmhouses again, which God forfend!

The stiffest position from which we must oust these Dutchmen is the strongly held one that they are the hub of the universe. By the "pass" system we have, if anything, rather reinforced them in it. *Haud ignota loquor;* fifty "passes" clamour daily round the writer, humbly 'tis true, but with an insistence and a breadth of claim which shows that the humility is rather an expedient than the conviction it should be. "The British Government does not make war upon individuals," says the proclamation. Well, the British Government makes a big mistake when its quarrel is with a nation of individuals. The proclamation is now (September 5) finally revoked, after a previous revocation and return to it of questionable policy; but the damage done is only less than it might have been. The Boer despises kid gloves as much as he does any other article of luxury,

and it does not decrease his contempt because he benefits by their smoothness.

But he would be a pessimist indeed who prophesied another general outbreak in this new province of the British Empire: the point we would enforce is merely that all that could have been done to expedite a settlement has not been done, and that it is unnecessary, if not actually dangerous, to leave at large in the country a proportion of the conquered not fully impressed with the significance of the conquest. The fruits of the mistake are perhaps only temporary, but they are unmistakable: they are being plucked at the very moment these words are being written.[1] Trains are being derailed, patrols cut up, border towns threatened, and columns of all arms being fitted out to deal with those pin-pricks in districts from which our troops ought long ago to have been set free to strengthen the striking power of forces at grips with the enemy farther north. But if this cam-

[1] The Wakkerstroom district formally submitted on June 16, 1900, and was taken over by General Hildyard. September 1 saw General Hildyard at the head of a column reoccupying Wakkerstroom in the face of a large and active commando of locals. Much the same kind of thing has occurred in the Standerton district—in fact the small columns mobilised to deal with disturbances in districts supposed to have been made as peaceful as Yorkshire have been too numerous to be even catalogued in a footnote.

paign has done anything, it has given us Britons breadth of ideas, the power to see results amid a tangled skein of details. These things, the aftermath of a too hurried campaign, are but details: the end is plain, and a magnificent end it will be. It is no idle dream now to think of these vast colonies as playgrounds for our surplus energies, and lungs for our choking labour-market. The vampire of corruption which has so long sucked the blood of every young enterprise is as dead as mutton. The Boers themselves, though enterprise troubled them little in their mealie-fields, will eventually rejoice in the sunlight hidden from them by the brooding wings of the beast. Public honesty has always got the better of private dishonesty in the end. Politically, the Boer is at present the most dishonest specimen of all the race of electors: it would be strange if it were not so, seeing that he has been called upon to fit out Governments deliberately rotten in every part. It has so infected him in all his dealings that it is doubtful if the present generation will ever be able to grasp the cleanness of British administration. They are sure to see a "jump"[1] in everything, even in concessions, and will be grateful for nothing. I think that we must make up our

[1] South African euphemism for a robbery.

minds to their suspicion and dislike to the end of the chapter. But the present generation will go—there are those who say that the world will not see many more generations purely Boer,—and can it be denied that in the course of their eventful chapter they have provided for future readers a tale of real if misapplied virility, of resistance to imagined enslavement not unheroic and not without its pathos?

XIV.

NIGHT.

A DASHING EXPLOIT OF MENNÉ'S SCOUTS.

NIGHT on the veldt, and all the winds at rest save one, which every now and then sends a faint warm puff across the miles of withered grass, like the uneasy snatches of mutterings coming from a man talking in his sleep. All around dead, utter silence—the silence peculiar to vast spaces—and deep blue velvet darkness resting upon the grassy immensity like a hot, heavy hand; a silence that makes the ears throb with a desire to hear it broken, which is not broken but deepened by the fluttering patter of a meercat stealing to its burrow, or a beetle settling with a little click upon a sun-baked ant-heap; a darkness that is impenetrable even on the dim yellow shadow of the upland veldt-road, and almost appalling in the kloofs and

hollows. Many fine things have been written about Night, but nothing that even in the remotest degree can tell the reader of the awe and solemnity of the dark hours that precede moon-rise on the South African veldt. What the sea is to water, so is the veldt to earth—its acme of nobility and grandeur, tremendous in its very featurelessness, because, like the sea, there is nothing by which one may measure it but itself and oneself.

But war, the spoiler of all serene things, has something afoot to destroy the colossal calm of this particular night. From far, far back in the darkness comes a faint, very faint, thudding sound, as monotonous and regular as the beat of the tom-tom from a distant Indian village—the sort of sound whose beginning is imperceptible, its throbbing blending so perfectly with the silence that it seems to have been going on for ever, and when it ceases is still apparently audible until some more real noise breaks the spell. A practised veldt-scout, lying ear to ground, would diagnose this faint, earthy drumming in a moment — horses' hoofs! Horses moving at a walk and in close order, and coming this way. The drumming grows louder and more distinct, passing from a dream-sound into the definite beat-beat of iron upon turf. Then

it dies slowly away, the advancing horses are descending a dip; it rises again, grows plainer, then plain, and intermingled with it the chink of bits and buckles, finally ceasing altogether apparently just on the far side of a rise in the ground higher than ordinary, which stretches across the sky like an indigo wall in the darkness. Whoever it is riding so late is riding very warily, topping no rises until certain what is on the other side. Two mounted figures, so black that they are plainly seen against the black sky, appear suddenly and noiselessly on the ridge-line, and stand for some moments as motionless as statues of ebony. Then they disappear: they are descending this side of the rise. The thudding and the steely chinks recommence behind it, and in a moment more the peace of the night is broken for ever, as, with a stir and subdued clatter, creaking of leather and blowing of horses' nostrils, a strong party of mounted men press over the rise, and, like the two phantoms in front of them, become again invisible in its shadow. A party of British cavalry! No more mystery about the veldt for this night; even its solemn darkness changes like magic into a "tactical aid," and the majestic vagueness of its contours into the most practical of considerations for these eighty purposeful

horsemen feeling their way over them. Man has a certain dominion over nature. Even in peace-time he can vulgarise the Alps and the Ocean, and in war the same immensities must dwindle to the terms of his twopenny scufflings, so that men looking down into a mountain gorge see nothing in its awful profundity but "cover," or, turning their eyes to its lofty shelves, complacently damn them as "good artillery positions!" Yet in war, the dullest resource of dullard man, there is the dignity natural to all natural things, its events are far grander than the men who make them, so that the mountain gorges and terraces gain as much as they lose by this dominion of man's over them, and remain terrible.

Certainly the veldt on this night, if it loses its tremendous quiet and mystery in the presence of the stealthy squadron of Britons, is as suddenly invested with an interest as tense as its former silence. For these men are on the most perilous errand that ever falls to the lot of the King's messengers, and are praying that the darkness may lap them round yet thicker, so that they may accomplish it with greater secrecy and certainty. A night attack! Let him who has ever taken part in one recall the sickening, wearing anxiety of it. Did he not feel as if the

force he rode with was clothed in luminous paint and hung with bells, because of his very agony of hope it was invisible and soundless? Was he not morally certain that he was leading them in a futile circle because his whole honour and hopes for life depended upon his leading them straight? Were they not discovered every moment by hostile bushes — nay, shadows— because discovery meant ruin? Few men can lead or accompany many night attacks and keep their nerve, but of those few the army in South Africa has luckily numbered many men whom an era of dangerous night-work, coming after two years of incessant strain, still sees unshaken and confident, and with confident men behind them. And the leader of this little band being such a man, they steal through the night over the anxious miles with no qualms, on their part at any rate, straight for the invisible berg ahead. Behind it lies their prey, 120 Boers sheltering, and, let us hope, sleeping under the lee of the great, grassy wall. A "pesky," irreconcilable lot of ruffians, led by a certain violent Erasmus, who have been swooping so often at the line defences from their eyrie that their destruction has become a necessity; and as one may as well attempt to arrest soot-flakes as Boers in the day-time, the blow must fall suddenly at night, and

in the very eyrie itself. A hazardous off-chance, indeed, even with equal numbers, with many hundred chances against it, and ruin too hideous to contemplate if unsuccessful; but with numbers actually less than those of the objective, a night onslaught on a wary semi-animal enemy is an enterprise bordering on the desperate. Yet such has been the unique and dangerous nature of the fighting in South Africa, that what in other wars has been considered a job too risky to be often attempted is here looked upon as all in the day's work; and this is by no means the first time that these eighty troopers have found themselves upon the open waste at night, with the camp far behind them and the tremendous unknown close in front. On they go, over the flats, down into the dark hollows, up the darker rises beyond, every man locked close to his neighbour, staring from side to side, and knocking his neighbour's knee when he starts, as he does momentarily, at a fancied sound outside the squadron, or a fancied sight away out in the blackness. Not a word must be spoken, even when Bill on the left of you clutches your bridle-arm, and points with his up to the left, where the rise we are breasting ends in a dim knob. Upon its very summit stand three black figures of horses, too dark to see more, motionless as the kopje they

stand on. They disappear, and from the knob comes the faint ring of a hoof upon a stone. Are we discovered? The officer in front holds up his hand, the leading files halt, those in rear bump into them, and the whole party stands huddled together half-way up the slope, every man's head bent sideways in a fever of listening. If those were Boers the game is up: they are galloping back to the laager now, and very few of those eighty blankets and picket-pegs in camp will see their proper occupants again. The commanding officer is whispering to the guide, a little active figure in a slouch hat, and one of his subalterns, who dismount and vanish on foot towards the knob. They are going to solve this riddle somehow. Quietly they creep upwards ten yards apart, and worm their way to the summit, and from there, to their intense relief, perceive the three black shapes some distance down the farther slope. Not Boers, evidently; probably not even Kaffirs. The subaltern and guide, taking no chances, stalk them carefully downhill through the long grass, revolvers at the "ready," and finally lie staring and frowning a few yards above the suspicious objects. A strained pause, then a low chuckle from the guide, which would lift a ton of anxiety from the band of listeners behind if they could hear

it,—loose horses! The two rise and walk swiftly back over the knob down to their friends; still no word, that is only one of a thousand chances made good, and the march is resumed.

A mile or two more of these risky rises and hollows brings them to the first certain danger of the enterprise, the mouth of a long narrow pass which runs around the western flank of the berg, emerging like a great drain from its opposite side, close to the farms about which the laager is collected. A Boer laager is not, as I have said before, the prim rectangular township which shelters a British force. As often as not it contains no tents at all, merely a few tarpaulins for the *brandwacht* or picket, and a handy clump of farm buildings and outhouses for the sleeping main body, with the stone kraals as stables for the horses and cattle. The farm to be negotiated to-night is of exceptional size, the property of one of the Joubert family, and scattered around it lie several smaller holdings, the abodes of the great man's *beiwohners*, or tenants. It is these outlying buildings that constitute the chief danger to an attacking force, forming as they do a ready-made encircling line of outposts, difficult enough to surprise singly, and exceedingly difficult to surround and isolate collectively, as must be done if the main laager is to be kept in

ignorance of the presence of danger. And the first of these lies four miles this side of it, at the narrow gate of the pass itself, shut in by steep, stony peaks and walls. A Boer picket is known to lie in wait there, and must be rushed because it cannot be avoided. The little force draws near, so near that the sentinel kopjes look like huge black fingers splayed out over it, and the men, as they commence to breast the long rise leading up to the rift, obey instructions previously given by noiselessly extending into three separate lines, those on the flanks trending up towards the peaks on either side of the nek, the centre one heading stoutly for the nek itself, through which they can see the sky as a deep blue V cut out of the black mass of the berg. At that moment a mounted Kaffir appears like a phantom amongst them, to be gripped desperately by a couple of troopers. But he is a friend, and is doing a friend's work. From his kraal by a distant spruit his animal instinct has told him there was something up to-night. Perhaps a herd of springbok flitted past his door in the darkness, with the faint rustle of tissue-paper blown along by the breeze, or a trio of coolan[1] flapped over his roof. Springbok and coolan do not choose dark nights for exercise without good

[1] Great blue cranes.

reason, and no native would sleep in peace without knowing from what the wild creatures fled. So the shabby horse and execrable saddle were pulled out, and Umpungan set out to work his way towards the disturbance, whatever it was, crawling, sidling, listening, noting more vanishing springbok, placing his face to the ground upon every hard flat, until at last the drumming and the clink of steel bits has reached his wonderful ears, and finally the body of horsemen has been picked out from the gloom by his wonderful eyes. The British soldiers, who pay for what they take, and do not abuse his women, or use the sjambok without an extraordinary amount of palaver and, *mirabile dictu*, good reason, are blundering across his domain in their stupid, noisy, white-man fashion. He laughs at their cohesion, at the iron on their horses' hoofs and the steel in their mouths — as well might his fathers have blown upon the conch when ambushing the sleeping lion in the good old days; he laughs at the mercy in their hearts for a vanquished enemy — 'twas not thus that his nation avenged the Sabine rape of their women by Bunu's braves; but they are his friends, and guessing what sport they are at, he rides on invisible and soundless on their flank, marvelling at their slowness and their daring. For he knows

the risk, none better; have not his people had many a terrible lesson from those crafty, keen-eyed white black men the Dutch from the south country!

And riding thus he does them the best of good turns. The Boer picket on the nek has been uneasy too, and instead of sitting quiet and silent as usual in the little round kraal which forms their shelter, have been moving inquiringly over the neighbouring ground, and are at this precise moment poking round the right foot of the biggest of the right-hand kopjes, well away from and out of sight and sound of the nek and the slopes approaching it. Here they are spotted by the self-constituted British flank-guard, who, risking sudden death by many bayonets, swerves sharply inwards towards the startled squadron, and, as related, is at once roughly collared. Explanations *sotto voce* to the guide, with much gesticulation, but in the softest of hunter's whispers. "No *brandwacht* on the nek, *baas*, *brandwacht* he down there! Be queek, he kom back soon!" They push on quickly, with more care now for speed than silence, with the native well in the centre in case he has lied, when——! But he has not lied, and they shuffle successfully over the dreaded spot, pass the little kraal with the embers of a

small fire still glowing behind it, and are a mile down the gorge before the Dutch picket, having seen and heard nothing on its excursion, climbs thankfully up to its rest again, knowing nothing of proverbs about horses and stable-doors!

And then the moon rose, not with the leisurely gravity of her British habits, but sending a lance of steel light with magnificent suddenness across the world of grass from some particularly black corner of the horizon away to the north-east. Like some enormous opalescent balloon she swings above the banks of night clouds, until having moved above everything definite in the sky by which one could perceive her movement, she rides apparently stationary like a white shining hole in the vast level of blue velvet above. What a change upon the earth beneath! The flats are resplendent, the hollows alternate with silver tracts of light and sharp triangular shadows as the contours of the knobs and kopjes are flung into them. The veldt-road is a broad river of glory, the goat-tracks like electric flashes interlacing and cris-crossing the broad surface of the veldt, and all little humble things like tufts of grass and solitary stones stand out with so much beauty that one makes a mental note to look if some of it is not still

upon them in the daytime. And the gorge along which our squadron is pressing becomes a splendid, illuminated peril. If there are any Boers upon the walls on either side, they *must* see the horsemen who move along pursued by a thousand scintillations from rifle-barrels, stirrups, even the little brass badges on shoulder-straps and hats. But luck is attending pluck to-night; they pass between the great silvery ramparts unchallenged, though many of them are so certain of hearing the harsh "Wies da!" which will call ruin to them, that the still air seems to be full of the sound. But they pass on, thread their way amongst the dongas which mark the farther exit of the pass,—a broad vague opening with none of the dangers of its brother gate, now four miles back in charge of its deluded warders, and in a few moments are again in the open with the berg behind them, in the very midst of the enemy's secret preserves.

And the first covert to be drawn is very close ahead, three little farms half a mile apart, and perhaps two from the main laager. The squadron splits up again into three parties, the two outermost vanish outwards, the centre one forwards, each towards its farm. They dismount, and leaving their horses behind walls, advance on foot and surround each building in

single file. From the houses no sound or sight, such luck was never seen, they are empty! Forward, still on foot, towards Joubert's great building. Another small farm shows up in the moonlight half a mile on. Blood must be drawn here or nowhere; there is a light in the window. With infinite caution it is surrounded, men walking on tiptoe, with care that even one spur does not clink against the other, every man with his rifle-barrel pointed towards that dimly lighted window, and bending low so that his body may not be seen above its sill. At last all are in their places, a ring of excited, crouching men, with the tiny farmhouse silent and sleeping in their midst. An officer crawls forward, revolver in hand, and then stands erect close up to the door; another worms his way to the window, and lies flat beneath it, staring upwards, his head stiffly thrown back. A few men, previously told off, follow, each with bayonets fixed. There is a moment of intense silence; then as startlingly as the report of a cannon comes a low call from the officer flattened against the door, "Maak oop!" ("Open!") There is a scuffle inside the house and a sharp ejaculation. The officer at the door steps back a pace and points his revolver, he at the window half raises himself from the ground and, stretch-

ing one hand over the sill, levels his weapon at the dirty glass. The men behind them bring their bayonets to the charge, and stand glaring over the points of them. The door is flung open from the inside. "God in heaven! what's up?" "Hands up!" The dumfounded old man at the door raises his rifle, and the officer thrusts his revolver in his face until its muzzle is buried in his grizzled beard. "No, my father," says a younger voice behind him; "don't make any trouble!" The old man yields, and he and his son come forth with rolling eyes and shaking limbs; no shame to shake at such an awakening! At the window the officer is standing covering two shrinking Burghers inside; they have their rifles in their hands, but resting upon the floor, and are crouching over them staring fixedly, as if fascinated, up at the stern face and four inches of blue steel looking at them through the pane. One of them shifts his hand along his rifle. "None of that!" growls the Briton, looking along his sights. And they too yield, in a maze of terror and bewilderment at the suddenness of it all, and with the others are placed under guard. So much for the picket. The cordon around the farm stirs and shifts, longing to break silence, and to get done with this ageing work. A

few whispered orders and they are off once more, in five parties this time, for the big job of the night, the attack on the commando in the farm.

The latter, a big rambling building built in two sides of a square, is perched like a hanging garden on the very shoulder of the berg, with plantations fringing its lower side, and around its upper side a tangle of long grass, old mealies, and the rank vegetation of two years of neglect. In the summit of the berg, hanging immediately over it, is a deep and narrow nek, called, from the owner of the farm, Joubert's Pass, the approaches to which from the far side are of such extreme difficulty that a force intending to attack the farm would stand no chance of doing so undetected by the Boer picket lying in the centre of the chasm. And from the farm, if attacked from the other side, as is the case to-night, this nek forms a secure line of retreat, covered by the rifles of friends upon it. So that there can be no hope of success unless it is first in our hands, and one of the five parties bears away and upwards to the left to seize it, with this much hope, that the picket hearing a movement from the "home" side may, until too late, suppose it to be from friends coming up from the farm, or even recognising the intruders as enemies, may flee in silence rather than make a

fuss with the road to their laager blocked. Of the other four detachments, one turns down to the lower ground below the farm to intercept stragglers, and the other three advance on the farm itself in a half moon. It is now nearly three o'clock, and deathly still. The moon, which has shone so bravely for five hours, has moved into a drift of clouds which streak across her mother-of-pearl disc like a woolly gridiron and shut out half her light. Already there is that strange feeling of coming day in the air, a little stir in the grass and the tops of the scattered trees, a time more melancholy than night, and making the thought that there can ever be another day almost an impossibility. The business in hand must be done quickly, for there is little hope of success, even of return, if Erasmus's desperadoes once detect the small numbers of their assailants. In a night affair the attackers can expect little mercy if they are worsted. The confusion, terror, and indignation of the surprised gives little scope or will to take prisoners those of the beaten surprisers whom it is impossible to shoot. The dismounted troopers, stealing forward in the half light, know all this well enough, and pray that events may march quickly so that they may forget it and quit themselves like men.

They have not long to wait. Down from the path above comes the clattering of a galloping, stumbling horse. A Boer half-way up the hill-side has detected the party climbing to cut off the picket, and with presence of mind he leaves the smaller issue to its fate and flies to warn the main body. The clattering changes to a heavy swishing as he plunges through the thicket behind the house. The three encircling parties run crouching to their places, only just in time. Then a hoarse shout from the Boer, who pulls up at the end of the wing and flings himself from his horse, "Come out, Burghers! come out! The English are on the pass!" He then runs behind the farm, calling wildly to a native to loose the precious cattle from their kraal, "Jantje, Jantje, you sleeping pig, loose the beasts!" The bewildered animals stream out, trotting lumberingly right amongst the men lying in ambush, and between them and the farm. Then some one fires. A roar arises within the building, an exclamation from a hundred startled men, the sound of a hundred men clutching at their rifles and clothes and leaping across the encumbered rooms. The first man appears at the doorway in the end of the wing, another shot and he is down. And then the tempest is let loose, and the scene becomes

indescribable. Out of the doorway pours a stream of half-naked men, some firing, some falling, all yelling in their terror, some curses, some for mercy. A ring of spitting, flashing fire bursts from the ambuscade; it rolls from end to end of the half circle, backwards and forwards, forward and back, its uproar redoubled by the tremendous smacking of the bullets upon the stone walls, the resonant singing note as they smite and tear through the corrugated tin roof, and the crash and streamy tinkle of shivering glass. From every window figures are leaping, some black, fully clothed, others ludicrously white in drawers and shirts. Some of the English charge madly up to these windows. "Hands up! hands up! you ——!" Mercy is given where asked (have British soldiers *ever* forgotten in the wildest of scuffles that their enemies were men with souls?), death is dealt out where roared for by a Mauser shot echoing from inside the rooms. The farm is surrounded by leaping, cursing figures, friend flying from friend in the gloom, some flinging themselves to the ground, some jumping high in the air at every shot, as if they expected the bullet to pass under their feet. It is an Inferno, a Babel, anything you will of horrible confusion, racket, and agony. But the Boers are too many for

their assailants. They break out behind the circle in twos and threes, in tens and twenties, some running at full speed with bodies bent until they almost touch the ground; others manfully rushing at the straggling line which hems them in; others slither through the thicket at the back, and the bullets rasp through the long dry grass over their heads. All have their rifles and bandoliers—a Boer will grip these in his sleep at a sound outside—and a party of them stand at bay in the plantation below the house, and add their fire to the appalling clamour. They are answered by a storm from the lower detachment, and melt away, leaving some gasping and gripping the twigs and undergrowth, or clutching at the empty air, as dying men will, and many rolling hideously among the sodden leaves, with animal-like cries, as men grievously hurt roll and cry. In the intervals bursts of rifle-fire are heard up by the pass. The picket there has stood to arms in time, and the British detachment can get no farther. A bad job this, for the way home must lie over that narrow rift. But the pace down below is too hot to inquire. For twenty mad minutes more the *cohue* seethes and roars around the farm, more scattered now, and farther from the buildings themselves. In odd corners, under

walls and bushes, even old waggons and heaps of mealies, men are finding men to grapple with and bayonet or clutch by the throat. "Hands up!" "Hands up!" sounds from all sorts of dark spots,—often from a soldier encountering another in the half light, when they part with an oath and a laugh which has something hysterical in it. And then it dies fitfully away, —a hoarse cry here and there, a plunge of something heavy in the brushwood, and silence.

The moon has gone out, and the first glint of day over the shoulder of the berg only accentuates the gloom. There is a long pause, which is broken into by the sharp commands of officers calling their scattered men around them. A small party, led by the commander, enters the farm to see if any stragglers still lurk within it. What a scene! Piles of blankets, saddles, impedimenta of all sorts, broken windows, doors wrenched off in the wild rush for the open air, and over all the vile atmosphere caused by a hundred men sleeping in a space too small for thirty. In one room the stump of a candle is guttering on the table, and by its feeble light a bed in the corner looks puffy and large to the quick eye of a trooper. "Some one under that mattress, sir," says he to the officer. "Come out of that!" No reply. "Come out or I will fetch

you!" Still silence. "Nothing there," says the officer, and turns away. But the trooper stays behind still doubtful, calling loudly once more to the motionless heap upon the bed. Finally, convinced at last, he raises his rifle with a laugh, and drives his bayonet down through the swelling mattress. But something squirms and heaves beneath the blow, and a red stain breaks out upon the quilting as the bayonet is withdrawn with difficulty. The trooper and another tear off the coverings, and lo! a stalwart, bearded Boer, writhing with a death-wound through the heart, his strong face working horribly as he dies clutching at the bed-clothing. Let us get away, even war has no right to this sort of scene! So the two troopers hurry off, looking straight to their front, sorry and afraid. Outside officers are getting their men about them from all quarters, flushed, panting men for the most part, though some are pale and drawn, and have lost their voices. Common soldiers are not all of common blood and muscle; there are some into whose souls the cruel strokes of war cut as deeply as ever they do into those of professional sentimentalists. These men, and I have seen many of them, do not stand roaring over a bloody trench after the assault, but move apart and stare in silence. Yet they have struck as

true and hard as any, right up to the bayonet-catch, and will do so again, perhaps with greater sternness and certainty for their terrible calm. But they are not pleasant men to meet at such times, having the air of those who see things that one cannot see, and apparently not recognising those whom they ought to recognise. No psychologist should write his volume until he has once rushed with the front line of a charging battalion: he will see many things he wotted nothing of, and will attain the fame of all true scientists, of being thoroughly disbelieved when he writes the truth.

And so they all roll up around their natural magnets, their officers, those trim young men who breathe but little quicker because their duty has led them into such a frightful scene; careful young men, with an eye to the end, no matter how wild and distracting the beginning and middle; wonderful young men, with something very much weightier on their square shoulders than the stars and crowns they are so absurdly proud of; for the quarrels and honour of the Empire, human lives and similarly ponderous responsibilities are crystallised in those little brass tokens. The detachments are collected in no time; one is told off to search for the wounded, one to round up the cattle, a third to drive the

Boers' riding-horses from the stables, a fourth to steal up to the pass above to aid the men already there in clearing a way for retirement when the time comes.

By Bellona, the time has come now! The Boers, about eighty, who broke through the thin ring round them, have brought to on the eyebrow of a wooded kloof away up to the right, and suddenly begin a rapid fire upon the farm-buildings, plainly visible now in the growing light, and in the light of the huge fire which is destroying a hundred saddles and innumerable blankets and piles of clothing in the farmyard. So the chief danger of all must be met after all,—the crossing of the berg in the face of the infuriated enemy. Well, the sooner the better. "Containing" the snipers with a flank party, the officer in command fairly rushes the great "bullfinch" ahead, the advanced parties divide and take the pass over both flanking kopjes; then come the captured horses and cattle, lumbering and trotting up the slope, driven by men cantering on either side; then the ten prisoners, a mournful *posse*, like tramps on horseback, all jogging with downcast heads and flapping, unbuttoned scraps of clothing, some very watchful troopers riding amongst and around them; then the rear-guard. Up they go, best pace, the

picket on the pass flies before them (what a night it must have been for them with that drama unfolding below them !), the Boers in the kloof lose sight of them and are too dejected to follow, and then with a whoop and a clatter through the short rift and down the steep on its far side, and a few moments later out into the glorious grassy open and safety, just as the great sun raises his red face out of the east and, knowing nothing of the night, beams good-morning and goodwill around. It will be some time before he can look over the roof of the lofty berg down into that blasted farm, or into the thickets and plantations where lie things that all his cheery warmth will never warm again, or in through the window at that twisted horror on the bed in the corner. By that time the British squadron will be riding into camp, weary, dirty, and unshaven, but happy in having done with all their might the perilous thing they had to do, and shouting for tea, having no use for the hydromel of admiration that is offered them from the comrades who have lain awake thinking of them and hoping for them all night. Something accomplished, something done towards the ending of this weary war, a little thing perhaps, reducing the enemy by no more than forty, and hearing the men who did it call it "nothing,"

I fear that of it I have perhaps made too much. But glory is not proportional—one single man can win whole worlds of it; and if these splendid doers of nothing ever set out to attempt what they will call "something," may I be there to see!

XV.

L'ENVOI.

AND so another patch has been woven into the mighty texture of this nation's history, a scarlet patch, not the first, nor the least vivid, nor with the fewest tears in its warp and woof. And being woven and cunningly fitted to its place, is it done with? is it a "has-been," or that miracle of moderns a *chose jugée*, to be decently folded away in the lavender and clean paper of men's minds, these being ready enough to afford it slumbering room in their secretest drawers?

There are too many who would have it so, naturally perhaps, seeing what manner of thing it is we have been engaged upon. War is a struggling against opposition and difficulties; do we, except in books, hear of successful men brooding fondly over their battles and weary marches on the road to success? I trow not, only upon the present are they self-eloquent,

sniffing perhaps reminiscently, but in no wise tenderly, at the crack in the drawer from which the faint scent of lavender is stealing. Nothing but the anxiety and sweat of life lie therein: why open it, it can but recall success, and she, radiant maid, is here to answer for herself. And war is a disease; does the strong runner pause to think of the dire sickness which but a short time back paralysed the strength in which he rejoices, so that for a space his limbs, now of steel and whipcord, tottered feverishly on the very slope which leads down to raging fires and terrors unspeakable? For war is also death, the utter death of humanity and all civilisation, of productiveness, of all the sweets of life, of life itself, a very elemental in its savage *abandon*, and do men prattle to themselves of death, or even, whilst bounding with life, tolerate its memory?

So that war were, on first counts, in danger and deserving of limbo, and is indeed by countless thousands of the foolish relegated to the same; not in speech and print of course, for to the speaker and bookmaker what so fair a field as bloodshed from which to reap the golden ears of attention and profit? But speech and print are, after all, the coarsest of expositions—nay, in national matters no exposition at all, so that we see men easing the *cacoethes* of

them both, receiving both profit and attention, yet recalling to their audience no single strain of the struggle which maddened them, of the disease which racked them, no pang of the death they looked on, or of the triumph or terror or tenderness which whelmed them whilst the events they describe were yet the *Present.* Ay, tenderness, it is that and its like which wells up most curiously, most holily, from the burnt desert of war; it is to note that and its like before it vanishes into the obscurity of the rest that the writer puts pen to paper. There is an immensity worth saving, first counts are nothing; struggles, disease, death, to what do they lead but an apotheosis if properly borne? Yet does no writer or speaker accord them their divinity; limbo, "a place of restraint," has them fast already, and the name of it is History; the talk of things that have *been*, rather than of passions and mighty things in the soul that have not *been*, but are and shall be for all time in some shape, no soul-thing once diswombed being destructible or "done with," like a treaty, or a battle, or a war. Wherefore History were more properly termed Histology, or any other "'ology" implying the relation of the completely concrete and destructible.

It may be doubted if this forgetfulness exists; an intelligible doubt whilst brass bands are still ushering homing warriors through their native streets, whilst banquets, swords of honour, luscious orations, and all forms of rejoicing are still reminding us that even war has its indignities and ludicrousnesses. But these are the beginning of the process itself, the very nothing from which the nothingness to come is born. What man with the spell of the war yet upon him *could* blow his bassoon in a band, or wag his tongue after dinner, or even, knowing that these noises were of the war, bear to listen to either? The spell of war! How quickly it fades and becomes a platitude, more quickly in these days and in this nation than in any other, these days of triumphant and much-worshipped paradox, whilst platitude, with most other old-fashioned things, lies taboo in limbo or lavender, which you will. Its sleep in either is the same, undisturbed, its rare awakening unwelcomed, nay, resented, its modest hues and stature being ridiculously mis-seen as "purple-patched" and "tall." Ask old soldiers of the Mutiny or of the Crimea, or younger ones of their adventures with the fierce hillmen of Afghanistan, or of Isandlhwana, the bloodiest *melée* within man's memory, is the spell of these wild dreams still

upon them? Nay, they are very much awake, and see with wonderful clearness what Colin Campbell did, what Raglan did not do, what was Sir Frederick Roberts's daily mileage, &c.; the dream, the haze, the spell have flown, the glory and fury have been folded away, only the detail or histology remains, or if aught else remains, is all that is produced. And why, because the speakers are Englishmen, and to the English all *spoken* dreams, glories, and furies are but dusty bores and platitudes, to be whisked away so that the Mechanism (so growled at by him who noted "the Signs of the Times") may be the more precisely seen. So what is in reality immortal rapidly becomes old and uncherished, save only in the most private moments of the few who have been under and known its influence, but a tithe, be it noted, of those who have felt no breath at all of what blew upon them from every side. And this tithe, as aforesaid, making all haste to hide their *rococo* sensitiveness, keep their peace save over the definite trifles whose effect on their nation has been as nothing compared to that of the mighty Indefinite of which the land from end to end is silent.

Dryden, in one of his not-for-the-young-person fables, tells the quaint old story of the young man who, having married a withered hag,

braces his nerves from sense of duty, and in response to piteous entreaties, to kiss her, when lo! his kiss is returned by a young and glorious princess! Fortune too good for one revolting at age voluntarily taken into safe-keeping. But let us kiss some of our old hags of sentiment, of platitude, and see whether like fortune will not be ours, to find our doubtful kiss answered a hundred-fold from things incomparably beautiful and young.

So doing, old words like loyalty, heroism, devotion, and death occur to us, young enough if use is youth, for do they not dot the columns of the newspapers like diamonds in a bracelet of brass, incongruous and better away? There is too much heroism spoken of, too little felt; are we all, *all* heroes? Even that simpering youth from Cape Town, we see him labelled such, full blazoned beneath not his own, mark you, but his wife's photograph in a picture paper—"The Lady Arabella Smirk, whose husband is one of the heroes of South Africa!"? Happy youth, blessed in such lovely arms and heraldry, but in no sense a "hero," attaining nearest to it indeed when his gorge angrily rises at the appellation. Away with him, there are heroes enough alive, too many dead! The former one may meet if one has the mind any wild night

out upon the veldt, patrolling, standing wearily on guard, lying breathless outside a riddled tent sending bullet for bullet, hoping—but not fretting overmuch—that they may not prove billets, having been for two years now a target, but immune. Or you may meet them rushing grandly through a whirlwind of fire towards a murderous hill on which squat helplessly two captured guns, soon to be recaptured, with wild cheering and desperate bayonet work by the few who reach them alive.[1] Or they are to be found as a straggling fence behind a convoy, keeping off a horde of galloping Dutch marksmen, dropping, here a man there a man, calling cheerfully to each other and defiantly to the enemy, who ride and shoot like the bold fighting men they are inside the very firing-line itself.[2] Then, what may well be termed heroes may be pitifully met groping along passages, gazing with sightless eyes back into the cruel past, or forward into the more cruel future; or hobbling crippled where once they strode on air; or worse still, being dragged in bath-chairs and other chariots of the maimed; how comfort these, the legless, eyeless, too often hopeless, chaff from the fiery winnowing? How indeed, save by whispering that only death is more deathless than a grievous wound received

[1] May 29. [2] May 25.

in action, that life—unprized by many only because they have never been near losing it—yet remains, the more precious for having been so precarious, calling to itself an infinity of pity and gratitude from the millions of unhurt inglorious lives around it. And the dead, where may not one meet them, on nigh every lone brown kopje in this lonely land, in every little valley, in every stony river-bed. One starts no longer at the sudden view of low mounds hiding the corruptible of common men who have put on the incorruptible of heroes in the sight of all the world.

Reader, have you ever considered what it is to be *dead*, to be so far as this jolly old world is concerned *Nihil*, out of it, no more than a memory; to have loved company and now to be less intimate and companionable than the smoke curling up from your pipe; to have loved talk and beauty, and to be for ever silent and hideous; to have loved thought, and to have become but a thought? ('Tis but an ancient platitude, all this, but we are by conspiracy kissing platitudes to get what return we may.) And more, have you considered what it is to be not only dead, but killed, casually and unimportantly killed, cut off as the poor beetle that we tread upon, with as

little diminution of anguish as he, because great poets have sung of the mischance? Why, it is as if our strong runner again were to vanish in midstride, or a fine singer after one glorious note; it is as anything that is miserably ended in full and beautiful career, or but scarce begun, leaving behind the immense, because unmeasured, void of what it might have been. Thus all who go forth to meet the Pale Horseman in duty's name are but a shade less than heroes, very nearly *quite* heroes if they face him unmoved, as many, not all, face him, answering stare with stare as dreadful, planting firm feet when he rushes, joying not overloudly when he departs and fades, turned by a stronger Horseman than himself, He who rides on the thunder, the Lord, and Omnipotent General of all hosts, living or dead.

But would not the world do well to keep the order of "heroism" sacred to those whom the Pale One rides down, seeing in his sword-stroke the only accolade thereto, for, having fallen, they can do no more, neither with body nor spirit? Poor bodies, how low they lie; happy spirits, how high they soar, both at the extremest end of all things; should not some extremest title of all be theirs, and what better, if not already too debased, than that of hero?

There is much that is deplorable in war, as there is much that is welcome and splendid, of which later, but nothing more deplorable than the *necessity* for it. The writer is not one of those who dream of a time when the lion shall lie down with the lamb. It were foolish to do so, seeing that in the present time the political lamb is in no great danger from her leonine neighbour, rather in greater security from his proximity. So long as he is dined she may nestle in peace of mind; and what political lion nowadays has not as much in his maw as he can conveniently hold, nay, more, causing great strainings and mouthings to adjust it comfortably behind his limited equipment of teeth? No, Utopia, the Millennium, or any you like of those uninviting never-to-be's dreamt by flabby dreamers will not have come until the lion shall lie down with the *lion* in amity, each with the ration he has been moved by the capacity of his vacuum to procure—no more, no less, no need to snatch at his brother's larger portion, or to stand snarling on guard over what he cannot stow away himself. And this will never come unless the race of human lions becomes emasculated, which Heaven forfend! If love of ease and heavy purchases of drivelling erotics could sap their real vitality, they would have long ago

sunk down dribbling and foolishly smiling side by side, with no strong meat but scented hay between their nerveless paws, and milk for drink instead of blood. And so men must ever war, feeding on blood and strong meat, snarling, snatching, grabbing in an infinity more evil than is sufficient for the day. They must also growl and snap back when others growl and snap at them and theirs. The only Utopia to be expected is one in which men so greatly fear each other, being all so terribly fanged and clawed, that a tense but universal peace shall ensue, a thing to make the angels weep and cynics laugh again. This is not only possible but exceedingly probable, but it will be in no sense a good-conduct mark to the balance credit of the children of men. But even this time is not yet: war is at present a necessity, deplorable always from the invariable ignominy of pretext on the part of one of the combatants. Is it too much to say that never in the history of warfare have *both* antagonists had, even to the most impartial spectator, the shadow of a ghost of an excuse for the terrible resort to bloodshed? Is not one invariably very much in the right, the other hideously and criminally in error? The reasons for war are like its experiences, superlative always, comparative in

nothing save in their extraordinary difference to the reasons and experiences of men in the pursuits of peace. Men take sides, of course, because most men, even the good and true, are almost incapable of considering humanity from the great human point of view, that in which nations, frontiers, religions, and partitions of all sorts soever have no place; they must be partisans rather than patriots in the great nation of mankind, Counsel rather than Judges.

And why, it may be asked, is all this "deplorable," seeing that it is apparently inevitable? It is deplorable because it proves that there are standards which even the billion man-power engine of thought and ardent hope cannot attain. There is no man of all the world who does not ethically sigh for peace as the dry field gapes for the showers; it is his only time of fruition, of gratifying his invincible instinct to *do good* to his fellow-men, and there is no man of all the world who will ever see it. Even the great pathetic Man of men had to confess His disappointment, "not peace, but a sword into the world!" No threat, as most read it, but a cry of wild regret. It is deplorable because it proves that men have called ascents to heaven what are no ascents at all, only mirages

leading apparently upward, effectually nowhither, or but cloudwards, no less finite because the summit is hidden from sight. Which were nothing to weep about if the would-be climbers were but individuals, for the defeated aspirations of individuals are no more than the single soldiers who fall in great actions, only infinitesimally damping amidst the tremendous enthusiasm, perhaps not damping at all, but incentives, so many little flames turning the red heat white. But when the great host of civilisation, having stormed its way up the centuries, with many a bloody lesson on the way, finds itself the conqueror of no mighty mountain-fortress of wrong, only a mere foothill, with peak upon peak towering behind, then indeed there may be despondency which one knows not how to allay, and a bewildered questioning, "Is this the *right* way?" A world conscious of defeat is no docile, disciplined army, but apt to fling itself hopelessly down-hill again with curses on its generals and text-books which have led but to an *impasse*, there to wallow,—as it has wallowed often,—until a new generation forgetting, or hoping, falls in again for a fresh ascent. Poor Sisyphean world, will the stone never poise upon the summit, a monument from

which one shall be able to gaze straight into heaven, too close for need of our dark glasses of speculation, dark enough in any case without men, in their ignorance or wilfulness, holding them wrong end foremost, belittling the Infinitely Great and saying, "Behold how small it is, is it worth striving for"?

And war is for many other reasons deplorable; because it is a killing and not a giving birth: there is no life in the womb of the War Goddess, no matter what splendid races have been her mate. In her track, where there was fruit, either of soil or soul, is now aridity; where there was joy is now misery; what was thine is now mine; what was God's, life in all its splendour, is now man's,—and is man a god to kill or make alive? What was man's—not the life itself, which is not man's—but the beauty and serenity of it, is now no one's, blasted away, annihilated. And even when she in her turn has been killed, the legacy of the War Goddess is not peace but more war, the secret war of nations who fear each other, or waged by the arrogance of those who are feared upon the shameful humility of those who fear, until after a few *lustra* men from the very hysteria of such a strain fling themselves upon each other again,

and the cruel Goddess walks the earth anew. Platitudes, platitudes! sighs the reader. Ay, peace was a platitude even in poor Lord Falkland's day, and as incapable a one to-day of preventing peace-loving men from putting on their clean shirts and ruffles to go forth to die in.

I spoke of the welcome and magnificent in war: how much of it there is, how splendid is the wine on which the world gets drunk! It is not difficult for the most fastidious of moralists who has drunk of it to reconcile its potency and charm with his shattered ethics. Can it be that good may come out of evil, life from death after all? Ah! that one could think so and be puzzled at so much good in the midst of so much evil. But there is no puzzle, the good one meets in war is but the innate immortal goodness of individual man, the evil the immortal evil of mankind. War is still a desert, for all the little oases smiling here and there in the Great Sahara. Very many there are, as I say; but the desert is vast, and they are to be met but frequently enough to keep the traveller from dying of thirst. Doubly sweet when they appear, therefore, small wonder that men forget the desolation without when lying beneath the cool shade, or that when the time comes to face

the burning sun and sand once more, they think more of the pleasure they have left than the pain they endure till it comes again.

And we who are still ploughing our way across the waste,[1] hearing every soul of the caravan saying to his neighbour "the end is near," yet seeing no minarets of peace ahead, of what oases shall we think of the many we have passed and blessed, leaving them with hearts so stabbed with thankfulness that in thought we are always in their shadow? First of all, that wondrous one of kindliness, not little but vast, wide-spreading, surprising eyes perhaps weakened by the cruel blaze with tears of very gratitude. How seldom has a man done aught at any time to merit consideration from his fellow-men, and even if he had it would be no surprise if, in the hurly-burly of war, he went unrewarded! But in war, I have met, and seen all others meet, but little else: sick, were we not cherished? worried, were we not comforted? sad, were we not with merry kindly laugh made happy at the sound of it? Oh, wondrous gleams in the darkness, melting the heart with thanks that must go unexpressed to English-

[1] Sept. 1901.

men save in un-English anonymities such as that in which we find relief! Little ye care, comrades, that they are there; what have ye to do with thanks? what do ye know of what ye have done thankworthy? and the gleams in the darkness are all the brighter for your ignorance, to be imperishably bright long after the darkness shall have fled! What an astonishment war is to a novice (this war to others than novices), nothing in it agrees with one's anticipation of it, few effects follow their preconceived causes. There is more danger and less fear than one imagined in safety, more toil and less exhaustion, more sadness and less complaining, more rage and less roughness; but there is no fact more paradoxical than this immense thoughtfulness of men in a condition where, if ever, the motto might rule "Every man for himself." And not only of them, but of the great eager army of watchers at home, less paradoxical, perhaps, but not less affecting. I warrant no man of the South African army will forget all his days how the gentle hand of sympathy and helpfulness was stretched across the ocean to touch his own. Great-hearted men and women, great-hearted newspapers and journals, no one but he who

has gauged the possibilities of human selfishness can truly appreciate the work they have done for the absent ones. Had the interest displayed been but in the soldiers' success or failure it were nothing, success or failure being vital matters in fisticuffs; but it has been more, something without a name, of a genuineness and profundity as unspeakable as the gratitude which has flown homeward to greet it.

And this I write because it has occurred to few scribes in this Army to place on record in fair legible ink its inmost feelings. Its deeds have been in some way set down by their doers, clumsily often and hazily, as is commonly the mode of swordmen wrestling with the pen; but its deeds have been, as I have shown, but the husk of it, beneath which rough integument seethed many emotions, o'erinforming the tenement, but inexpressible, so that the world of thankfulness within it is for ever invisible to those who have called it into existence. If I have shown ye aught of it, ye kindly ones, believe me it is but a hundredth part—*parvus parva potest*—cold prose being dumb to tell it all. The smallest grain of it, indeed, is so akin to poetry, that of those who read there may be but a hundredth part who understand, who will

not laugh at this small undertone of thanks, deeming it an unmanly phantasm that an armed host of Britons should feel anything but the rage of arms. But if ye who understand believe, then something of recompense has been done, and what under Heaven is so heavy a debt as an unsaid "Thank you"?

Which said, I will say no more of surprises, and it would have been impertinence to have called these things so if they had not surprised wise men as well as fools. The courage, endurance, and steadfastness shown in this war have been no surprises even to a nation unlearned in, or forgetting war, as our nation had undoubtedly done. The veriest milksop of a country could not have started less skilfully than this old prize-fighting land of ours; but in the clumsy science of war, grit is as good as guns and better than brains, which shows that war is in reality no science at all, only, as I called it before, an elemental. Vaubans and Krafts may write as they will, but all their erudition is but Dead Sea fruit unless superimposed upon material of solid, unscientific worth. Does Atkins care that he forms part of a "counter-attack" when the shells are bursting in his face, and the ground is shivering and shaking at their terrific impact?

or does he reflect upon "shock" or any other tactics when he feels the throb of his galloping charger beneath him, ramming the terrified brute against the very barking muzzles of a thousand levelled rifles? Not he! Tactics are a science no doubt, but war is not, and it is positively startling how seldom the two have even kissed finger-tips in this heavy slogging-match of a campaign! When they *have*, dullard War has fled ashamed, and bloodless triumphs have shown the dunce how uninformed and terrible a thing he is. Some day they will wed, and then the British Army will be the guarantor of an eternal *Pax Britannica*, so potent an engine will it be, with its tremendous courage and tremendous energy brought down like a Nasmyth hammer upon the very spot at each resistless onset. No political nut, however hard, but will crack miraculously in the mere presence of it.

It has been almost a shock to England to learn what great military possibilities she possesses. Britons have not yet entirely lost their fear of British armies! But they must do so, for it is obvious that their safety and honour will be more and more in the keeping of their battalions from henceforth. That of the earth's surface they have earned and inherited has

become far too great a treasure to be safely intrusted to their one unruly watchman the sea, with his drunken fits and his perishable weapons. Universal peace! Never believe it: it is a Nirvana unattainable until after the death of the weary, yearning bodies who desire it. I venture to paraphrase an old tag[1] into a new maxim of Hafiz—

"My son, do not fear to be strong because men have ta'en oath to be mild,
For the arm that can fell the great bull can uphold the faint form of a child.
If they say, 'Oh, my brother, be still, lo! the world shall let blood nevermore,'—
Do thou answer, 'So be it,' and place fifty thousand more rifles in store!"

Yet though Nirvana never come, there is, as I have shown, rest for the weary even in the present toil, and attainable beauty as perfect as any in the unattainable; unhoped-for rest, unexpected beauty, have they been peculiar to this corpse-strewn desert, or have men, distrusting mirages, been warily silent concerning them in the past? They are no mirages, but solid, imperishable stuff, upon which one may climb, if not to heaven at least to a little rest-house amongst the peaks, leaving the storm whirling

[1] "Si vis pacem," &c.

far below, forgotten in the sunlit beauty and serenity. Strange that war, last act of man's hatred for man, should yet be able to produce an unconquerable love for one's fellow-men! Are the smart paragraphists wrong after all, and is it paradox that is hoary, and platitude the ever young?

But the time has come to end speculation, insistent though it be in the astonishment, the gratitude, the softened heart with which one has seen such healing flowing from the great hurt of war. By what precedent does one listen to the closing sounds of the combat as if they were the notes of some anthem dying their liquid death up in the dim tracery of a cathedral roof? By the indestructible within the destroyer man which has been from all time, "vital spark of heavenly flame," burning brightly through the cold savagery of the human ice, iron, and all other ages. Unquenchable now, even in this clear cold-water age of passionlessness and analysis, when men dare to look even into the blazing glory of Heaven with calculating eye, smoke-glassed with conceit, curiosity, infidelity, or any other of those adamantine protections they have been permitted to acquire to save their gimlet eyes from blindness. Can we doubt that it was

meant to flame up eventually over all the earth, a glow of universal love enwrapping all the nations?

But it will never be, and the little spark must keep the great cold world warm until the Afterwards, when the human race will be shown its divinity in spite of itself, when "there shall be no more war."

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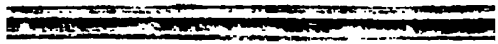

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